Marxism Today

November 84 75p

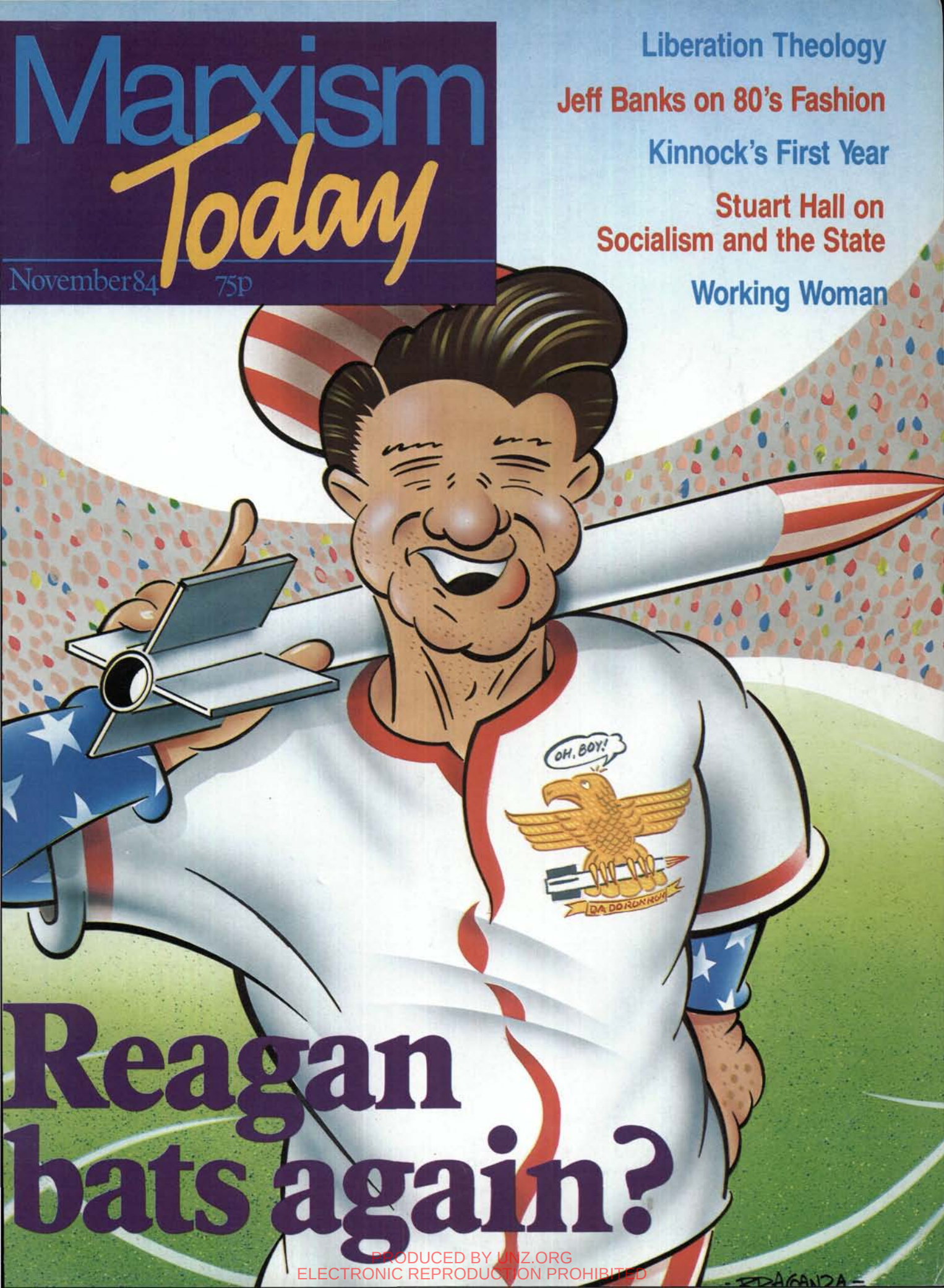
Liberation Theology

Jeff Banks on 80's Fashion

Kinnock's First Year

Stuart Hall on Socialism and the State

Working Woman



Reagan bats again?

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Marxism

Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

NOVEMBER · 1984 VOLUME 28 NUMBER 11

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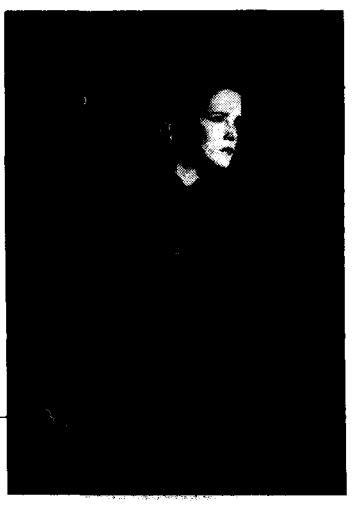

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THE BULLET BITES BACK

When a jubilant Irish Naval Service escorted the gun-running trawler Marita Ann to its base near Cork recently, they found in its hold not merely machine guns, grenades, pump action shotguns, and an armour piercing heavy machine gun, but also – appropriately – a large consignment of Armalite rifles.

The cache was graphic evidence that the Provos fully intend continuing their military campaign. Any ideas that electoral strategy was taking over from 'the struggle' had already been scotched some weeks before by Danny Morrison, Sinn Fein's Director of Publicity. In a revealing interview in Dublin's Magill magazine he re-asserted the combination of the Armalite and the ballot paper in a way that made it clear there will be no let up in IRA activity: 'The thing I have to emphasise, that all republicans are united on,' he said 'is that electoral politics will not remove the British from Ireland. Only armed struggle will do that. . . I think there's very little room for the IRA to lower its range, so to speak.'

In the South, Sinn Fein's electoral potential has caused general political migraine amongst all parties. But the decline in its total Northern vote in the European elections – down from 103,000 in June 1983 to 91,000 in the Euro poll – inevitably created suspicion that the party had reached the limit of its growth in voting support in the short term. (Its percentage share was maintained however over the two polls).

Sinn Fein predictions that the party would soon out-poll the SDLP have now given way to the view that the republican movement must face a long haul. While the struggle at the ballot box massively increases media exposure for the party and builds its presence at community level, the relationship of ballot paper to Armalite, places the former at the service of the latter: it consolidates the movement's mass base rather than providing the leading challenge to British rule.

At the back of Sinn Fein leaders' minds is what they perceive as the key weakness in a purely ballot box challenge to British rule: the awareness that even the most spectacular electoral advance could always be thwarted by a re-partition of the province to preserve an enclave with a loyalist majority.

On the military front the Marita Ann episode provided some revealing insights. The presence in the hold of a new Browning 0.5 inch heavy machine gun – capable of penetrating a tank's armour or demolishing a house at 400 yards – suggested a dramatic escalation of military activity by the Provos. The weapon – the most powerful ever acquired by them – could have been used in a full frontal attack on British army barracks.

The seven ton haul also included grenades, which may have been intended for attacks on commercial premises – again, a departure from current policy: in recent years the Provos campaign has concentrated on killing members of the security forces.

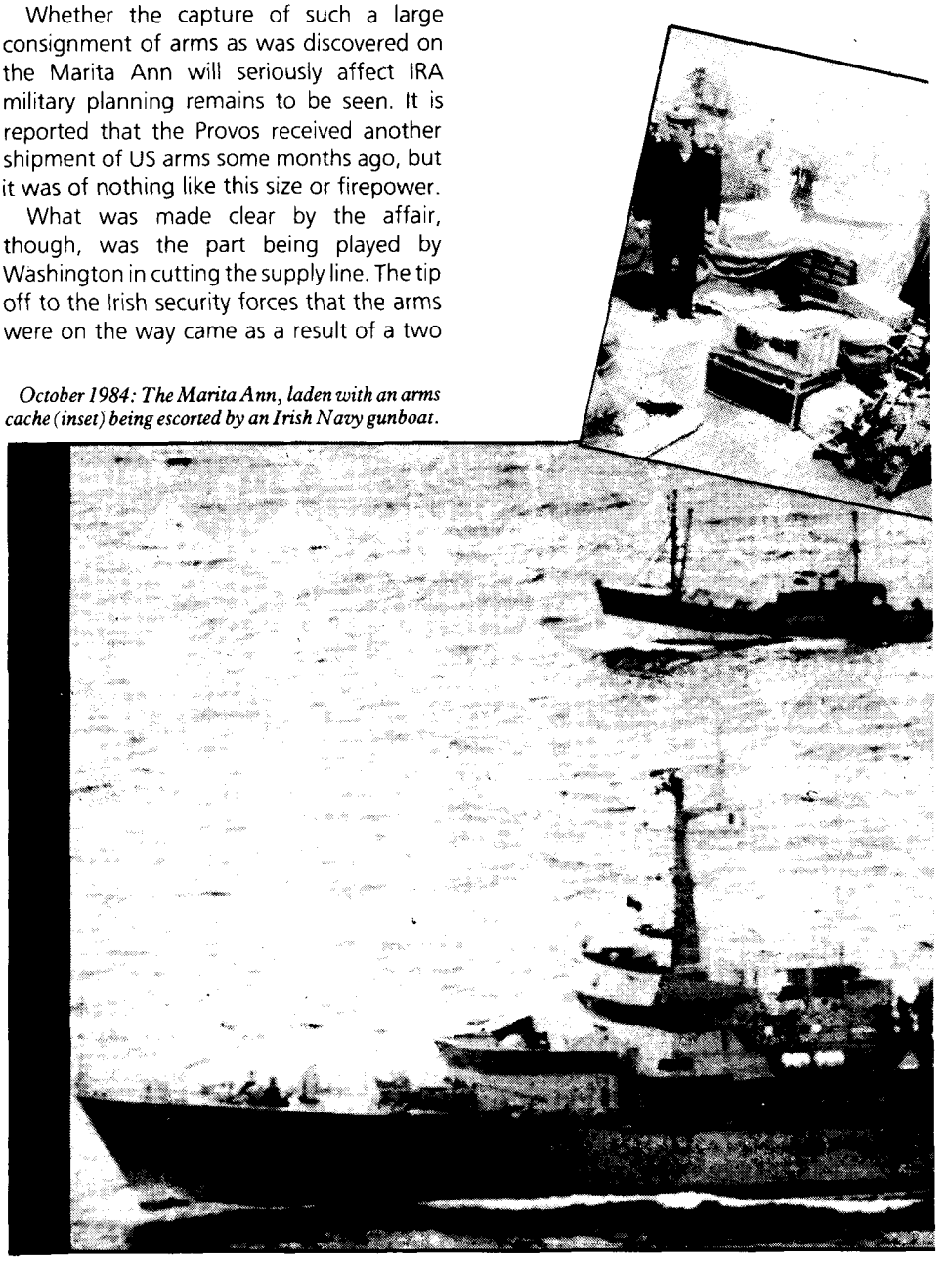
The logic behind all this is that violence directly undermines British government attempts via the Northern Ireland Office to create an image overseas of growing stability. Sinn Fein unwittingly assisted this by its recent concentration on 'constitutional' methods. It now argues military activity must go on to contradict any idea that Northern Ireland can be governable under British rule.

Whether the capture of such a large consignment of arms as was discovered on the Marita Ann will seriously affect IRA military planning remains to be seen. It is reported that the Provos received another shipment of US arms some months ago, but it was of nothing like this size or firepower.

What was made clear by the affair, though, was the part being played by Washington in cutting the supply line. The tip off to the Irish security forces that the arms were on the way came as a result of a two year surveillance operation in the US by the FBI. The actual movement of the Canadian supply ship from New York to the point of transfer to the trawler was monitored by US satellites and naval vessels.

The Reagan administration has been playing a careful game recently, notably in the election-orientated pub crawl to Ballyporeen in May. The US administration is simultaneously courting Irish American voters at home (there are over 45 million in all, many with strong Republican sympathies) while also acceding to British pressure for action against IRA support groups.

During the Marita Ann affair there was a conspicuous reluctance in Washington to put on record the US role in trapping the trawler. Confirmation of FBI and CIA con-



October 1984: The Marita Ann, laden with an arms cache (inset) being escorted by an Irish Navy gunboat.

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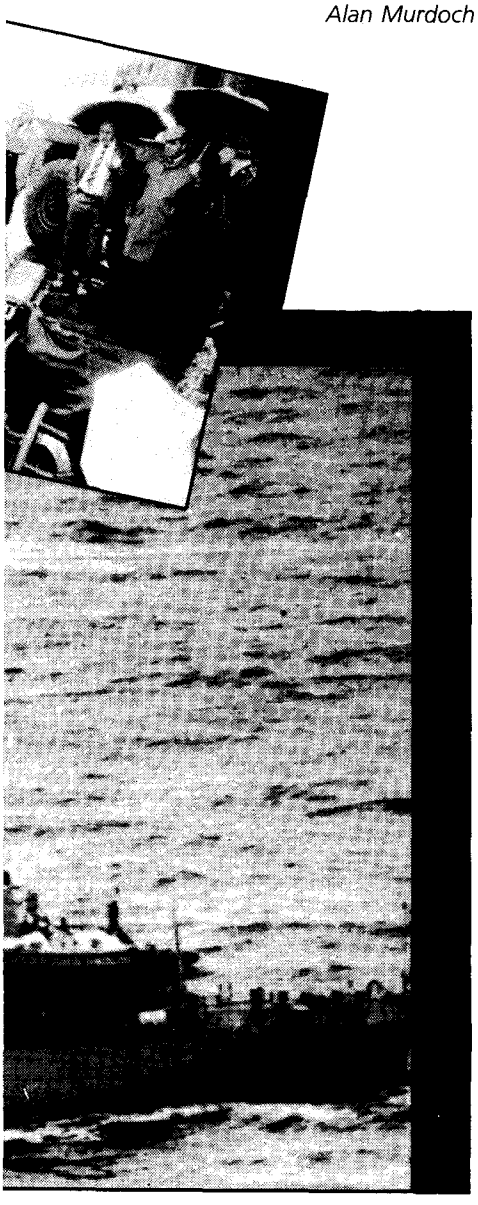
tributions came only unofficially from the State Department. And in Dublin it appeared a deal had been done with Washington not to damage Reagan's image with Irish Americans: Prime Minister Dr Garrett Fitzgerald and his Minister of Justice both declined to say where vital information orignated.

In practice, US policy on Ireland – in private if not in public – closely accords with that sought by Mrs Thatcher. Apart from the FBI's two year old 'Operation Leprechaun' to infiltrate the Provos' back-up groups in the States, the Reagan administration has adhered closely to British guidance on other fronts. During his Irish visit, Reagan's speeches touching on the Northern question avoided committing the US to any major independent diplomatic initiative (something Dublin politicians had sought) that would by implication have questioned Britain's ability to resolve the issue.

Alan Murdoch



NO STRIKE, NO SAY

'We are proud to have pioneered the agreements . . . the traditional union approach is not enough.' 'The only thing you have got to be to sign a no-strike agreement is a bloody fool.' 'They should be banned by the TUC for giving away the ultimate protection workers possess.' These statements by John Grant, head of the EETPU's Communications Department, Tom Sawyer, NUPE deputy general secretary and TGWU national officer, Larry Smith, graphically highlight the bitter dissensions the new 'no-strike' agreements have prompted.

The row reached boiling point when the EETPU announced that this autumn a delegation from their union is flying to Japan to try to sell the idea direct to firms considering investment in Britain. For the real novelty lies in the fact that it is the union itself which is offering to hand over the right to strike, indeed pressing the idea on employers. The EETPU has produced a brochure which will be distributed to 500 UK companies and translated into Japanese detailing the advantages of the new approach and carrying, to the fury of their opponents, endorsements from government ministers Tom King and Kenneth Baker.

The background to the dispute amongst the unions lies in the recession, harsher management attitudes and changes in the industrial structure. The unions need to recruit new members in new sectors to make up for losses in the declining traditional industries, and the Thames Valley and Scotland's 'silicon glen' are the target. US unions failed to make this leap. Today they represent less than 20% of the workforce.

Here, as in the US, high technology companies such as IBM, Motorola, Maxell and National Semi Conductor, are vigorously anti-union. Japanese employers in particular have a phobia about strikes and the restrictive practices and disruption they attribute to Britain's multi-union industrial relations structure.

The agreements the EETPU has signed with electronics companies such as Inmos at Newport, Toshiba in Plymouth, Sanyo in Lowestoft and with Hitachi at their Hirwaun plant in South Wales are intended to answer these objections and to prise open the door to trade unionism in the 'sunrise' industries. The agreements provide for a single union, the EETPU, to represent all employees. This, in itself, has caused problems. At Hitachi, for example, ASTMS, APEX, TASS, UCATT and the TGWU all had members.

The main bone of contention, however, lies in the clauses in the new agreement which limit members' rights to take industrial action. At Hitachi the agreement states that all difficulties must be solved 'without lockouts and without any form of industrial action.' At Inmos there is an assurance that the union will 'avoid any action which interrupts the continuity of production'.

Instead of solving issues by a trial of strength the parties agree to compulsory binding arbitration by an outside third party. Based on American experience it is called 'final offer' or 'pendulum' arbitration. If procedure is exhausted without agreement then the arbitrator must come down completely in favour of one side or another. The argument is that by outlawing the traditional British practice of splitting the difference, you encourage both parties to put forward realistic cases and bend every sinew to settle through negotiation for fear of losing out completely.

Most thoughtful trade unionists concede the need for change if their organisations are to meet the challenges of today and a 21st century only 16 years distant. Yet this particular approach neglects the continuing crucial importance of the strike weapon for all employees. It is not just a matter of annual wage increases. The knowledge that employees can ultimately withdraw their labour restrains employers in a myriad of ways in their day-to-day conduct of industrial relations and exercises a civilising influence on life at work. Arbitration is not a purely neutral process. There is no objective way of deciding whether it should be £5 or £6, dismissal or a final written warning. Nor is it simply a matter of government pressure on arbitrators, though such pressures do exist. An essential ingredient in decision-making by the third party is the relative power of the two sides. Remove the strike weapon and one side has its essential power to influence events taken out of play.

The EETPU claims that insufficient attention has been paid to the third aspect of these agreements: *all* employees become monthly paid salaried staff using the same car parks, toilets and dining facilities. Moreover, the new company advisory boards give elected workforce representatives confidential information, provide consultation before key decisions are taken and create a helpful and co-operative atmosphere.

The critics point out that the agreements do not even secure 100% union membership – in Toshiba less than half the workforce belong to the EETPU. They limit union democracy: in some cases the deals are sewn up and signed before a single worker is employed. The advisory council system, far from

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curbing management prerogative, eliminates the day-to-day negotiations by shop stewards which constitutes the best protection for union members. Critics point to the case of Sanyo on the East Coast which opened two years ago after Pye had closed the plant. About one-third of the workforce used to work for Pye. Today productivity is far higher, almost at Japanese levels. But the workforce have not shared in the benefits; at a basic wage of £83, the average shopfloor worker earns less than he or she did with Pye and are amongst the lowest paid in the industry.

What particularly worries many trade unionists is a potential bidding down of conditions as other unions join in the scramble and seek to convince employers that they are the most eligible suitors to organise and control their workforce. At the projected Nissan car plant at Washington New Town, for example, three unions were involved in tendering for sole bargaining rights. The AUEW offered a no-strike deal and the TGWU's refusal to do so led to it dropping out of the bidding. Nissan then stated that any expansion of its operation would depend on the no-strike approach succeeding and expressed a desire that any UK component firms supplying it should negotiate similar agreements. The AUEW has also signed a single union agreement with the Peterlee based Japanese ball bearing manufacturer, NSK; whilst the third union involved with Nissan, the GMBATU, has a compulsory binding arbitration arrangement a stone's throw away with the Norwegian controlled NEK company.

There is even more concern at the impact these deals can have on the public sector. NUPE and the civil service unions in the aftermath of the GCHQ affair have roundly condemned no-strike agreements as simply paving the way for government plans to ban industrial action in 'essential services', a phrase which would cover most public utilities – the NHS, gas, electricity, water, for instance. This was promised in the Tory election manifesto and Employment Minister Tom King recently stated that a consultative paper with proposals for action will shortly be published. The SDP has recently supported this approach and in a recent national opinion poll two-thirds of those surveyed felt that employees in essential services should lose the right to strike in return for a guaranteed annual wage increase. It is clear that the Government is thinking along these lines. Legislation could turn what is a developing, but as yet, insignificant trend, into an important transformation of British industrial relations.

John McIlroy

Child and cross; a camp in Nicaragua.

● THE VATICAN AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Alarm bells are ringing in the Vatican corridors of power. By the year 2000 half the Roman Catholics in the world will be Latin American and well over half will be living in the Third World. Since the church is not a democracy, of course, these simple demographic facts do not have any electoral significance, but taken together with the increasing tendency for the Latin American church to have a theological and political mind of its own, it is not in the least surprising that the Vatican is worried.

The problem for the Vatican is political in two senses. In the first place, the Latin American church has a way of doing theology – usually called 'liberation theology' – which attaches priority to the political and economic, social and racial context within which theology is done. For Latin American theologians these 'materialities', as they are described, are generally summed up in one word: 'oppression', both inside their own nations and of Latin America as a whole. The higher, spiritualised theology which, in the minds of many liberation theologians, characterise most European and North American theology, is not any the less governed by material factors – mainly those of economic and political domination. 'First world' theology is only the more insidiously ideological for the fact that it is chronically incapable of knowing that fact.

Liberation theologians, therefore, insist that traditional Roman Catholic theological models fail theologically because they fail politically. And they fail politically because,

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they say, theology can be done only on the basis of a prior commitment or conversion which, though not exclusively political, has an inseparably political dimension. This commitment is described as 'a preferential option for the poor.'

So powerful have been the arguments for this 'preferential option' in Roman Catholic and other Christian circles that the expression has become a truism, even in many local churches in this country. What gives teeth to this proposition, however, is the Latin American tendency, in varying degrees, to work out its implications within a more or less Marxist framework. Particularly worrying to Vatican officials is the parallel tendency to re-read the whole Christian message in terms of the need to take sides within 'the class struggle'. And when the 'class analysis' is directed at the institutions and power relations within the church itself, it is not in the least surprising that, as was the case in September with the Brazilian theologian, Leonardo Boff, some of these theologians are summoned to Rome to explain themselves.

In this way the threat posed by these tendencies within the Latin American church is political in a second sense. Power relations within the church are threatened not just by the demographic preponderance of Latin Americans within it, but by that fact taken together with the distinctively Latin American experience of *how to be a church*. For the 'preferential option for the poor' is not primarily a theological option. It is that, but it is much more too: you can be arrested and very likely shot in El Salvador merely for being in possession of a copy of the *Magnificat* in which Mary proclaimed the 'greatness of the Lord' for having 'pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly' for having 'filled the hungry with good things the rich sent empty away.'

The Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara once commented: 'When I feed the hungry they call me a saint. When I ask why they are hungry they call me a communist.' How far this experience of what it takes to be a church has departed from Western Christian expectations is evident when you consider how many Christians in Britain, say, could get themselves to pray the Guatemalan Lord's Prayer: 'Our Father', it reads,

> 'Your name is taken in vain
> When they make you out to be a little anti-communist God,
> And therefore invent National Security Laws. . .
> Laws which give power to tyrants like
> Pinochet, Videla, Bordaberry, Stroessner and others.'

A Church which is beginning to pray like that without scruple is not going to organise itself spontaneously along the lines of traditional Roman Catholics hierarchies. In any case it cannot, in Latin America, normally do so. The shortage of priests to run the local churches is chronic. Consequently many are forced to organise themselves without a priest at all and find their own models. It is estimated that in Brazil alone there are over 80,000 so-called *Communidades de base*, or 'base communities', and the development is widespread in parts of Central America too. They threaten traditional church structures not so much intentionally as simply by bypassing them.

Underlying, therefore, the theological rhetoric of the recent Vatican 'Instruction', which warns of the theological dangers of liberation theology (particularly from a too uncritical dalliance with Marxism) is a fear that these developments in Latin American Catholicism threaten the 'unity of the church'. Translated out of Vaticanese, the perceived threat is to the authority of Rome over the Latin American church. Whether the threat to that authority turns out to be real depends, in part, on the terms in which the Vatican and Pope John Paul choose to force the issue. Recent Vatican statements, lacking as they do much sympathy with the formative experiences of the Latin American church, lead to a growing sense of crisis.

Denys Turner

● HEALTH CARE REAGANOMICS

No phrase like Margaret Thatcher's 1983 'The health service is safe with us' has acquired anything like that prominence in this year's US presidential campaign.

Quite the contrary. As Professor George Silver, professor of public health at Yale University has observed: 'If at a time when the pressures of high medical costs have never been greater. . . and when the Reaganite welfare policies have deprived more and more low income people from eligibility (for health care and other benefits) the Democratic Party does not feel the necessity even to speak out on the subject, more than medical professional obduracy is at work.'

Indeed, the only proposals in Walter Mondale's manifesto that would have any direct impact on health care are the commitment to preserve the age for free medical care at 65 years, and the pledge to spend more on those who suffer from Sickle Cell Aneamia – largely blacks, Hispanics and people from the Eastern Mediterranean. President Reagan, content to stand on his record, has simply reaffirmed his commitment to 'a basic level of high quality health care' and his opposition to proposals for compulsory national health insurance.

For there is within Congress all-party agreement that far too much public money is spent on the health care of the old (under the Medicare scheme), and on the poor (under Medicaid). Fuelled by the system of paying for medical attention, the number of malpractice suits, the explosion in the range and expense of new diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, the power of consumer demand, and an ageing population, spending on health has soared to over £230bn a year, until it now accounts for almost 11% of America's GNP – about double the proportion in Britain.

Medical inflation has been outstripping the general increase in the cost of living with ease: last year the cost of a hospital bed rose by 11%, more than three times the rate of inflation. In California it increased by 22%. Insurance companies provide cover for some 60% of Americans, and they merely jumped their premiums up by 15%. Medicare and Medicaid, however, are publicly funded. The federal government already spends some £44bn on Medicare alone and Congress was faced with forecasts that the cost of the scheme would almost double to £86bn within five years. In one month a bill that promises to overhaul the health care system in the USA was approved by both Houses in Congress. The Reagan administration tentatively estimates that these changes will save some £15bn over five years.

This change, which may also offer a better guide to efficiency than any currently available, is being closely watched by the DHSS in England. Under the old system hospitals had a virtual license to print money. They charged their patients, the insurance company or the government for whatever diagnostic test, operation, or drug was given. The incentive was for doctors to use to the full every sophisticated and expensive aid available. The new method is based on 'diagnostic related groups' (DRGs) and is supposed to reverse all that. Researchers at Yale Unversity examined 250,000 medical records and found that any of the 14,000 or so diagnoses and procedures mentioned in the International Classification of diseases could be fitted into one of 467 DRGs, and that these were a sufficiently reliable guide to the sort of treatment given and the length of stay in hospital. It only remained to fix a price for each DRG, with an allowance for teaching, urban or regional status and hospitals would find that if they spent more than the permitted norm on a patient they would lose

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money, if less they would make a profit.

It is clear, however, that this system, which insurance companies have also introduced, may establish other incentives too: to cut corners rather than costs; to encourage those who would previously have been speedily discharged from hospital to stay on to consume the average level of resources they have paid for; to restrict access for those with multiple disabilities and more severe illnesses – those who would inevitably require more medical attention than the average.

Although the US's per capita spending on health care is roughly four times that here, provisional estimates suggest that in 1982 more than 50 million Americans were at some point in the year without any form of health insurance (including Medicaid) – 22 million more than in 1980. Usually, 86% of the time, it is employers who pay for health insurance, so when work dries up, as it has in the old manufacturing industries, the gates to the medical system swing shut. Thus the health department in Ohio forecasts that 20,000 babies a year will be born to parents who have lost health cover due to the recession. Public money already underwrites the health care of some 49 million Americans, (23.5 million elderly people, 15 million poor and 10.5 million veterans); there is no discernible enthusiasm to extend the facility to the 30-50 million Americans excluded from the system altogether.

Many of the families still covered by Medicaid have to wait several months for their certificate to arrive and without one, treatment of any sort is difficult to obtain when it is not refused outright. Even with a certificate family doctors are often reluctant to take Medicaid patients onto their list. Medicaid reimburses hosptials at more or less the going rate, but general practitioners providing ante natal care receive just £9.23 per consultation. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, the department of health of Hartford, Connecticut found in a survey that 87% of obstetrician-gynaecologists refused Medicaid patients. In 1982 the health care grants given by the federal government to American cities were cut by 42%, and 10% fewer people were provided with health care, according to the Children's Defence Fund, a national pressure group.

Inequalities in health match the unequal access to medical care. In 1982 the number of babies who died in the first year of life, the infant mortality rate (IMR), was 9.9 per 1,000 live births for whites, and 19.9 for blacks. The proportion of babies weighing less than 5.5lbs at birth, a good indicator of vulnerability to disease, was 58 per 1,000 for whites and 122 for blacks.

In Detroit, 63.1% of the population are black and the level of infant mortaility was 25.2 in 1980, 26.2 in 1981 and 26.9 in 1982. Over the same period the number of black mothers receiving no or inadequate ante natal care increased from 149 to 172 per 1,000, and the number of low birth weight babies rose from 128.4 per 1,000 to 147.7. By contrast white infants improved their position.

And what would the Democratic Party do for these disadvantaged people, more vulnerable to disease and less able to secure medical care than their healthier and more prosperous fellow citizens? 'Our goal,' the party's manifesto says, 'is to strengthen families and to reverse the existing incentives for their destruction. We therefore oppose laws requiring an unemployed parent to leave the family or drop out of the workforce in order to qualify for assistance and health care.' There are few votes this year for any major financial programme for the poor.

Peter Parker

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SPECIAL YOUNG WOMEN'S ISSUE

sex & drugs & rock 'n roll

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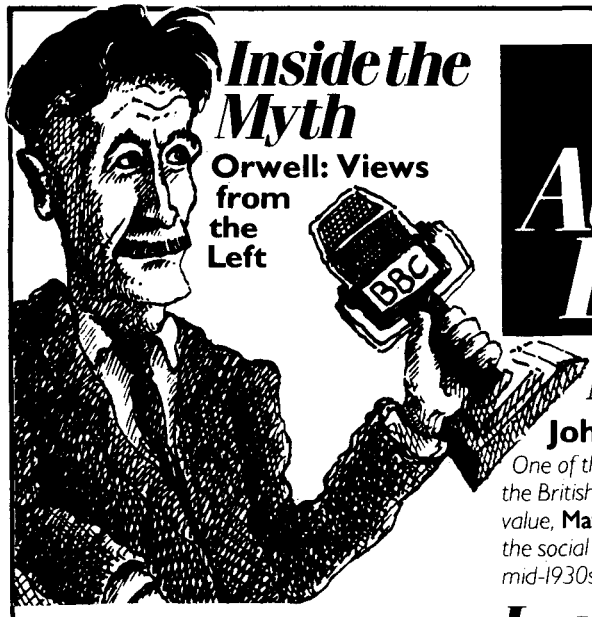

Inside the Myth

Orwell: Views from the Left

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The Tories have determined on the most ambitious course of all: severing the links between individual trade unions and the Labour Party. No less than the future of the Labour Party is at stake.

An Unhappy Marriage?

The Labour-Union Link

Peter Hain

'A rich party financed by secret funds derived from the sale of honours and from large subsidies subscribed by wealthy men, is trying to disable a poor party which carries on its work by modest contributions from trade unionists.'

Similar denunciations to this one from a 1927 May Day Manifesto may well be directed at the 1984 Trade Union Act. But, if so, they could underestimate the full significance of this latest Tory law on trade unions, because it contains perhaps the most serious challenge to its historic unity and strength which the Labour movement has experienced this century. The Act is a key part of a Thatcherite project to break the links between the unions and the Labour Party and alter the balance of class forces.

In 1983, 47 unions affiliated 6.1 million members to the party and contributed £2.9 million out of their political funds – nearly 80% of the party's national income.

Now, section 3 of the 1984 Act will require unions to win an *individual* ballot of their members by March 1986 in order to retain their political funds and their party affiliation.

If the ballot goes against maintaining a political fund, then it will be illegal for the union concerned to remain affiliated to the Labour Party. The political fund would effectively cease to exist and both the union and the party itself would be in breach of the law if the present formal Labour links were somehow maintained.

What is 'political'?

Furthermore, the new Act attacks the rights of even those unions not affiliated to the party. Unions without political funds could be prevented from conducting public campaigns in the future, because the definition of 'political objects' contained in the 1913 Trade Union Act has been updated.

The old section 3(3) of the 1913 Act allowed unions to use their *general* funds for campaigning activity of a broadly political kind provided its 'main purpose' was to pursue unions' 'statutory objects' (ie, members' industrial or economic interests). But under the new Act such activity has to be financed out of *political* funds if its 'main purpose' can be shown to be to persuade people either to vote or not to vote for a political party or candidate.

As the TUC has pointed out, there are 'a number of grey areas concerning what may or may not be interpreted as party political expenditure'. Remember, for example,

> the objective was clear: to make Britain 'safe from socialism' by reducing Labour to a rump leftist group

NALGO's campaign in the spring of 1983 which included very effective national newspaper advertisements against public spending cuts? Such action could be stopped under the new Act, admitted a Government Junior Employment Minister during its committee stage in the Commons, because NALGO has no political fund. So could union campaigns against privatising local council services, especially if these encroached upon the run-up to a local election. Activity of the kind undertaken by telecommunication unions against privatisation of BT could also be stopped if it continued to be financed out of union general funds.

In short, if any public initiative by a union could be construed as influencing support for or against a party – even if it happens to form the government of the day – then it could be caught by the legislation. This could only be avoided by unions having political funds and by financing such campaigns from them, which is rarely done now since they are directed almost entirely at supporting the Labour Party.

Previous attacks

Of course, this is not the first time there has been a legislative attempt to restrict the political role of trade unions and to end their links with Labour. Prior to 1908, trade unions had for over 30 years and without restriction used their general funds to pursue political objectives, including representation in parliament. But, that year, a court judgement in the Osborne case made this practice illegal. It was a time when the infant Labour Party was attracting increasing union support and the motivation behind the legal challenge included a desire to stem its growth.

After the Osborne case there was a concerted campaign by the unions to legalise their political activities. Eventually a compromise was introduced by the Liberal government. The 1913 Trade Union Act made provision for a system of 'political funds' separate from 'general funds', from which members could 'contract out' if they did not wish to support their unions' political activities.

This system survived until the Trade Union Act of 1927 when, the Conservatives decided to take advantage of post General Strike demoralisation and impose new restrictions on unions. Amongst these were the ban on civil service union membership of the Labour Party and the introduction of a 'contracting in' system. 'Contracting in' made it necessary for trade unionists positively to contribute to their union political funds, and succeeded in reducing the numbers who did so. The net effect of the 1927 Act was to reduce union membership of the Party by 37%. However, when Labour came to office after the war, the civil service ban was lifted and 'contracting out' reintroduced.

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Political funds

Having a political fund does not mean that unions are automatically affiliated to the Labour Party, though almost all have done so. Establishing a political fund is a process governed by the 1913 Act – deciding to use that political fund to affiliate to the Labour Party is a separate decision. Under union and party rules people contributing to the political fund through their regular contributions become 'affiliated members'. 'Full' members join their local Labour Parties directly, though there is considerable overlap and many 'full' members are 'affiliated' through their unions as well.

By means of this affiliated status, unions are able to use their political funds to support the Labour Party and in return are given rights and representation in the party's decision-making structures, the most visible of which being the wielding of union 'bloc votes' according to numbers affiliated at annual party conferences.

Clearly, the consequences of large-scale disaffiliations in financial and organisational terms would be serious, especially coming on top of the party's recent near bankruptcy. No doubt it would survive and perhaps links with unions could be maintained in some form. But, particularly after the 1983 election debacle, the new Act could threaten the very viability of the Labour Party.

Instead of concentrating on the method of paying the political levy, the 1984 Act seeks openly to break the link between Labour and the unions. This was contrary to the impression given in the Green Paper which preceded it. Entitled *Democracy in Trade Unions*,[1] that Green Paper, issued by Norman Tebbit in January 1983, signalled the Tories' intention specifically to legislate on the political levy.

In fact, the Act makes no mention of the method of paying the political levy. Instead the Government negotiated an agreement with the TUC under which 'contracting out' would remain, albeit in a looser form, with unions promising to make more effort to inform members how to opt out.

This was greeted by the Tory Right as a considerable Government climb-down, while many in the trade unions saw it as a victory secured by reasonable negotiation. In fact the switch in tactics brought several advantages for the Tories. It stands a better chance of cutting the unions off from Labour and crippling it financially. It deflects the charge of discrimination: of imposing restrictions on unions funding Labour whilst leaving untouched company financing of the Tories.

But, perhaps most important, it puts the labour movement on the defensive: by giving members the right to vote on a political link decided by their union generations ago, the Tories can present it in terms of *extending* democratic rights in unions. Even though their appeal to 'union democracy' is hypocritical – for example, it did not operate in GCHQ – the truth is that the Tories do strike a chord when they complain about the gap between the leaders and the led in the trade union movement. They have been able skilfully to exploit this by appealing through the media over the heads of union officials to individual members. And the system of individual balloting specified in the 1984 Act will increase their opportunity to do this in the future.

'Americanising' British politics

However, to see the new law merely in terms of a punitive measure against an electoral competitor or an act of malice against trade unions would be to miss its full significance. For it is playing a key role in a much more ambitious political project designed to undermine the established institutions of the labour movement and thereby create a radically different political and industrial structure in Britain.

The Tory Right had begun to question the system of union affiliation to Labour with increasing regularity after Thatcher's 1979 election victory. Then in 1981 a broader consensus for this position emerged when the formation of the SDP produced a barrage of criticisms from its leaders against the union link. In the autumn of 1982, the SDP published a document entitled *Reforming the Trade Unions* which attacked 'contracting out'. Norman Tebbit's Green Paper followed in January 1983.

> the 1984 Act seeks quite openly to break the link between Labour and the unions

After the 1983 election, with Labour just having scraped into second place in the popular vote, political commentators began to canvass the prospect of the Alliance becoming the major opposition force. At about the same time, Mrs Thatcher gave an interview to the *Director* magazine in which she cited the USA as an ideal, saying she favoured two major British political parties operating 'within the same framework of free enterprise'.

The objective was clear: to make Britain 'safe from socialism' by reducing Labour to a rump leftist group, with the implicit assumption that the Alliance would take its place. Just in case there is a temptation to dismiss all this as the fashionable talk of the 1983 summer, the Tory chairperson, John Selwyn-Gummer, repeated the argument on BBC radio in August this year. Discussing America's party system, he said: 'It is very valuable to have two sensible parties that both support capitalism. We have suffered in Britain from having the Labour Party.' Several weeks later *The Times*' political columnist, Ronald Butt, echoed the same view: 'To become a significant political force, the Social Democrats must take and keep more votes from the Labour Party, aiming ultimately to replace it . . . it would be for the health of the nation to have a social democratic rather than a socialist party as the principal alternative to the Tories.'

It is sometimes underestimated how alarmed the Tories have been by the leftward shift in the Labour Party and the potential threat to their interests from a left Labour government. Restructuring the British party system to minimise this danger has become a growing preoccupation of the Tories. But this ambition should also be seen in a wider context. Thatcherism's strategic objective is to destroy the postwar social democratic consensus and replace it with a new Thatcherite consensus. Achieving that ambition depends on creating a party-political system which is committed to that new consensus. This requires either that Labour plays ball, which it clearly won't, or that Labour becomes a marginalised third force.

In parallel with this 'Americanisation' of British politics, is a desire to 'Americanise' British unions too. The Thatcherites have increasingly criticised 'politically motivated' trade unionism, contrasting this with a desirable form of trade unionism in which defence of sectional interests is the guiding principle. Norman Tebbit is fond of reminding the public of his role as a trade union negotiator in his previous career as an airline pilot, where he 'stood up for his members' interests', whilst simultaneously criticising union leaders for playing a political role through their influence in the Labour Party.

But this Tory anxiety goes well beyond the Labour dimension to union activity. They have also been concerned at the rise from the late 1960s onwards of a more 'campaigning' style of unionism, notably

[1] *Democracy in Trade Unions* (HMSO Cmnd 8778).

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in the public sector. Unions like NUPE, NALGO and latterly the POEU have sought to defend their interests by going outside the traditional territory of 'free collective bargaining' and mobilising public support. Such campaigns have been directly opposed to a central objective of Thatcherism – reducing the scope of the public sector – and so limiting their effectiveness would be an attractive outcome to the Government. It is significant that the new Act could do precisely that.

Class, union and party

The opportunity for the Thatcherites to carry through their strategic attack on the political unity of the labour movement must be seen against the background of the latter's relative failure to cope with the postwar recomposition of the class system. There have been important changes in the composition of the working class, which have been reflected in the make-up of the unions (notably in the growth of white collar and public sector TUC members) but nothing like to the same extent in the Labour Party. Consequently, the Labour Party's political base in the trade union movement has been seriously undermined. Notwithstanding Labour Party rhetoric about a unitary Labour/union movement, more than ever before there are now 'Labour' trade unions and 'non-Labour' trade unions – the membership ratio being not far short of 50:50.

This change has been fairly dramatic. Between 1957 and 1977, for example, the proportion of TUC organised trade unionists affiliated to the Labour Party declined from about 70 to 50%. (Over a longer time-span the picture is even more dramatic since the proportion of TUC members in the Party stood at 93% in 1913.) From 1964 to 1979 – a period when Labour was in power for all but four years – TUC membership shot up by 46%, but the number of trade unionists affiliated to the Labour Party rose by only 18% (see table 1).[2]

The Post Office Engineering Union is the only major new union to affiliate to the Labour Party in the postwar period. Recent ballots by NALGO in 1982 and the CPSA in 1983 showed majorities of 8 to 1 and 2 to 1 respectively against establishing political funds and Labour links. Almost all the existing 'Labour' unions first affiliated in the early part of this century when the party was establishing itself as the parliamentary wing of the trade union movement. There has been a serious neglect of this reality and why there have been so few new affiliations. The reasons are profound. Clearly one factor is that once the Labour Party became an alternative party of government in its own right, it attained a certain political autonomy which made subsequent union affiliation more problematic.

Table 1

	% Increase in Trade Union Members since 1964	
	Affiliated to Labour	Affiliated to TUC
1966	0.7%	6.5%
1970	0.3%	12.9%
1974	5.2%	20.1%
1979	18.3%	45.7%

The fall in TUC union membership of the party reflected itself electorally too. In 1964, 73% of trade unionists voted Labour; by October 1974 this had fallen to 55%, by 1979 to 51% and by 1983 to 39% (a MORI poll in September 1984 found a recovery to 48%, but one not sufficient to reverse this long-term trend). If the actual numbers of trade unionists voting Labour over this period is taken, the picture is quite stark: between 1964 and 1983 the number dropped by two million while the number of TUC members rose by two million (see table 2).

In addition, closer inspection of the nature of Labour's affiliated trade union membership hardly suggests a fighting force for socialism: in 1983, for instance, four million trade unionists voted Labour – about two million *less* than the party's affiliated union membership!

Table 2

	Trade Unionists Voting Labour	Trade Unionists Affiliated to Labour
1964	6,077,980 (73%)	5,502,001
1974	5,501,100 (55%)	5,787,467
1979	6,185,280 (51%)	6,511,179
1983	4,098,900 (39%)	6,101,438

% is of total TUC membership

Politics and unions

The Thatcherites may indeed have had a closer appreciation than many in the Labour movement itself of the tenuous basis of the 'political' dimension to British trade unionism. In some ways the formal link to the Labour Party has obscured a reality of a relatively 'non-political' tradition in British unions in which sectionalism and economism have invariably been dominant.

Even the name *Labour* Party was chosen in 1906 (against the left's preference for *Socialist* Party) because the majority of trade unionists involved 'wanted a name for the party which transcended politics'.[3] Despite the TUC's formal decision in 1899 to establish a party of Labour, British unions have tended to see their political role in highly ambivalent terms. Whilst there has always been a wide margin for political action, with some unions conducting overtly political campaigns from time to time, generally unions have acted politically only to restore or advance their ability to engage in 'free collective bargaining'.[4] Invariably, their political activity has been pragmatic and instrumental: particular political initiatives by particular unions would be in response to particular challenges to their sectional interests.

Furthermore these political interventions have been mainly parliamentarist. The terms of the TUC's 1899 decision were quite specifically 'to ensure that working class opinion should be represented in the House of Common by men [*sic*] sympathetic with the aims and demands of the labour movement'. This reflected an ethos which saw legitimate political action as being confined strictly to the electoral arena. So far as the unions were concerned, Labour's task was to win elections and represent working people: any wider conception of extra-parliamentary action was excluded.

This legacy of pragmatic parliamentarism has encouraged union leaders to turn up to Labout Party conferences, become politicians for a week, and wield their bloc votes almost in isolation from memberships not really involved in their unions' political role. Only during crisis periods (such as 1970-74) would the trade union leadership see more overtly political forms of mass action as a serious option.

Weakness of Labour-union links

Thatcherism's instinct that the Labour connection with the unions was vulnerable is underlined by evidence that rank-and-file trade union support for the party is much weaker than is often assumed by those active in the labour movement. For instance, a 1974 study of a major union, the Union of Post Office (now Communication) Workers, showed massive member ignorance and disinterest in the political activity of their union.[5] Only half of those paying the political levy realised they were doing so, and there is no reason to suppose that this was untypical of the movement as a whole. In fact the practice has been to make it hard to 'contract out' – a short-term expedient which has encouraged a political relationship with rank-and-file members which is passive and there-

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fore susceptible to being undermined.

Additionally, unions have become less influential and less active within local parties. This is partly a demographic problem: unions with the strongest Labour ties historically tended to be those based mainly around urban areas with close links between industries and communities. Their connections with the party were quite strong for cultural and geographical reasons – the miners are a classic example. But these (mainly manual manufacturing) unions have been declining in numbers and influence, whilst others (mainly white collar and public sector) have grown. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, 'Whilst it is clear that there are mining constituencies, and may once have been 'railway' constituencies, or 'engineering' towns, it is doubtful whether there are ASTMS cities, or NUPE counties.'[6]

Furthermore, there has been a declining proportion of party activists from manual unions and a predominance on constituency general committees (GCs) of members from white collar or public sector unions sometimes not affiliated to the party. This has encouraged the constituencies to be-

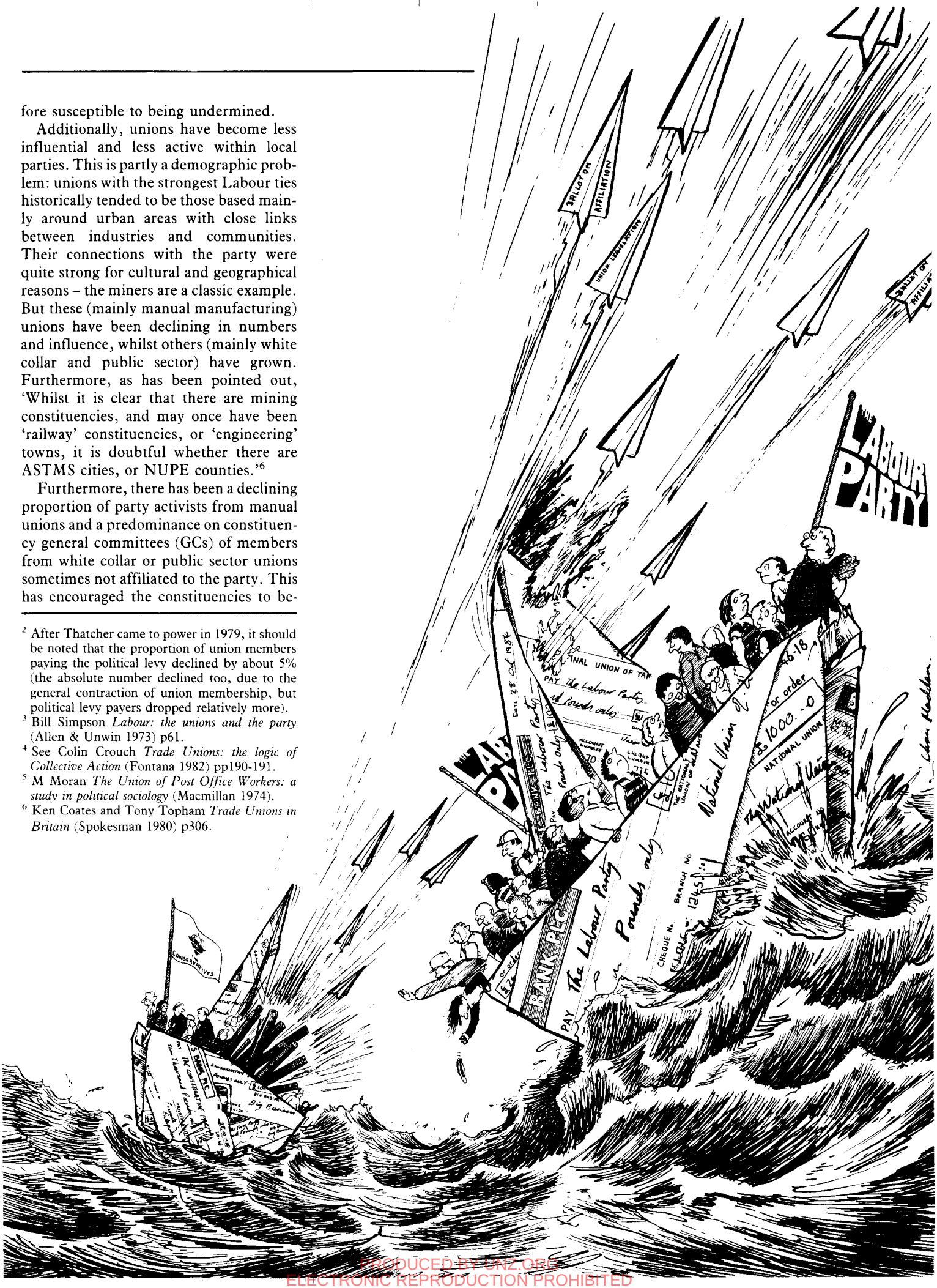
[2] After Thatcher came to power in 1979, it should be noted that the proportion of union members paying the political levy declined by about 5% (the absolute number declined too, due to the general contraction of union membership, but political levy payers dropped relatively more).

[3] Bill Simpson *Labour: the unions and the party* (Allen & Unwin 1973) p61.

[4] See Colin Crouch *Trade Unions: the logic of Collective Action* (Fontana 1982) pp190-191.

[5] M Moran *The Union of Post Office Workers: a study in political sociology* (Macmillan 1974).

[6] Ken Coates and Tony Topham *Trade Unions in Britain* (Spokesman 1980) p306.



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come more culturally and politically distant from their union base.

In any case, very little life flows through the system of union affiliation to these GCs. (GCs are the main decision-making bodies of local parties and consist of delegates from ward branches and from affiliated groups such as local branches of unions nationally affiliated to Labour. Sometimes party activists will become union delegates on GCs because they cannot get elected from their local branch and rarely do they report party decisions back to, or get mandates from, their union meetings. There are exceptions to this of course but the general picture is one where the local union connection is a paper one. In real terms, unions are bound to the party *nationally* by financial links and by the direct representation which they have on Labour's National Executive and at Annual Conference, the mass membership base of their political involvement being neglected.

The net result is not simply to offer a series of *political* hostages to fortune, but almost to invite the Thatcherites to question the *democratic* legitimacy of union members' link to Labour. This link is in truth an ossified one, held together by historic institutional ties. The absence of opportunities for rank-and-file – as opposed to activist – participation is a real handicap as the labour movement prepares to fight to preserve its political funds.

Ballot prospects

So what are the prospects for winning the political fund ballots? In a MORI poll conducted for Trade Unions for a Labour Victory earlier this year, four questions were put in a survey of members of affiliated unions only. The survey distinguished between all respondents ('All') and those who said they were 'very likely' to vote ('VL'):

Questions		YES	NO	Don't Know
'Political activities on behalf of its members'	All	44	45	11
	VL	51	46	3
'Be affiliated and give money to the Labour Party'	All	38	52	10
	VL	44	51	5
'Using up to 5p for political activity'	All	42	47	11
	VL	45	48	7
'Being able to support MPs in the interest of the union's members'	All	63	27	10
	VL	66	29	5

Although the proportion of 'All' wanting to maintain affiliation to the Labour Party stood at only 38%, this is less discouraging than it may seem. First, the proportion goes up to 44% amongst those 'Very Likely' to vote. Moreover, when it comes down to it, there could well be a differentially higher turnout of those favouring the link with Labour, since those who do not feel strongly against or are apathetic may not bother.

Second, the MORI poll recorded views before any active campaign to win ghe argument. For most union members, the merits of the case for affiliation to Labour have still to be argued. Additionally, when it is shown that having a political fund is essential to secure political representation of union members' interests in parliament and when it is understood that public campaigning financed out of general funds could be illegal, the chances of winning a majority should improve.

for most union members, the merits of the case for affiliation to Labour have still to be argued

The detailed breakdown of the affiliated unions surveyed by the MORI poll shows some interesting results (see table 3). At the time the survey was conducted (spring 1984), the unions most likely to remain affiliated were the miners, communication workers and electricians. Next came a batch including NUPE, APEX and the engineers, followed by the NUR, POEU, UCATT and GMBATU, with the TGWU being only just above TASS in having a 20% majority against affiliation. Less surprising was the even bigger majority against amongst ASTMS members. Clearly, there is considerable ground to be made up in some unions.

However, it should be remembered that the question on the ballot papers will invite a vote for or against *political funds* – not explicitly on Labour affiliation. And this gives further grounds for optimism on the outcome, for the MORI poll indicates a more positive response to the questions on political representation, the best being on sponsorship of MPs where there is a large majority in favour.

Some trade union leaders have interpreted the MORI results as a reason for playing down the Labour dimension in the campaign to win the ballots, and playing up the advantages of having a political fund to sponsor MPs and lobby government in the union's interests. Doubtless, these advantages would be stressed as part of a convincing case for maintaining a political fund and in appealing to the middle ground – and, since the only serious avenue for parliamentary representation is through Labour, they would tend to point in the direction of party affiliation anyway.

But it would be naive to imagine that any campaign could be conducted without intervention from the media, the Tories and the Alliance. They will ensure that the issue becomes the future of the Labour Party, regardless of any tactical stance by union officials – and already the Liberal Party has announced its intention to campaign for a 'No' vote.

Although some elements in the labour movement have suggested that the political funds section of the Act should be boycotted, this is not tenable because it

Table 3: Political Fund Ballots: Union by Union Survey

Questions asked	Political activities on behalf of its members	Affiliated and give money to the Labour Party	Support MPs in Parliament in interests of members
*APEX	+14	− 6	+52
ASTMS	−14	−35	+51
AUEW-Eng	+ 9	− 5	+34
*AUEW-TASS	−31	−21	+13
COHSE	nil	−23	+46
EEPTU	+20	+ 1	+35
GMBATU	+19	−14	+47
NUM	+37	+58	+32
NUPE	+15	− 1	+28
*NUR	−10	−13	+ 5
*POEU	−10	−11	+74
TGWU	− 7	−20	+27
*UCATT	− 2	−12	+25
*UCW	− 5	+14	+67
USDAW	− 5	−17	+31

* indicate unreliable sample.
NOTE: Figures given are the *difference* between the percentages 'for' and 'against'.

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operates in a quite distinct way. Whereas the 'industrial' provisions of the 1980, 1982 and even 1984 Acts require some third party to activate them and whereas they may or may not be enforced according to the political climate of the moment, that is not the case for Part III of the 1984 Act which regulates political funds: it is automatically enforced.

Thus, whilst it is easy to see how the picketing restrictions in the 1980 Act can be defied or ignored by trade unionists, it will not be possible to do that over political fund ballots. A gauntlet has been thrown down which the labour movement cannot but pick up. As Ron Todd pointed out in a recent interview: 'Not to hold ballots would be to surrender our rights to have political funds and to be involved in political action against the Tories. I do not see any contradiction between opposing the Acts in the industrial arena and carrying out ballots to keep our political funds.'

Campaigning

Next year's political funds campaign could present an unprecedented opportunity to argue for socialist ideas and Labour policies in the workplace. But this is unlikely to happen if the campaign is approached defensively. If it is seen simply as a matter of preserving existing institutional links, and if all trade unionists are offered is the chance to renew their membership of a passive Labour supporters club, then they may well turn their backs on the Labour Party, for the rot has set in too deep to be able to rely with any confidence on a campaign that seeks merely to defend the status quo.

There is probably a better chance of succeeding with a positive campaign aimed not simply at defending the existing links, but explicitly recognising the need to breathe new life into them. An appeal will probably need to be made on *policy* grounds as well. Labour's plan for jobs, a shorter working week, a statutory minimum wage and advancing women's rights are amongst the questions that should all be raised in an attempt to persuade union members that their votes in the ballots are as much about defending their interests as fighting for alternative government policies.

So far, discussion over strategy has been confined mainly to leadership levels in the labour movement. On August 1, Labour's National Executive met jointly with leaders of affiliated unions. The consensus there favoured a 'rolling campaign' of ballots, with unions most likely to succeed starting first in order to create a winning momentum for the rest. The meeting agreed to set up a special co-ordinating group with a full-time campaign unit and a budget of £150,000. They also accepted a paper from Bill Keys of SOGAT 82 which argued that 'the campaigns should not be run as if they were about affiliation to the party, but as campaigns to preserve the freedom of political action by trade unions.' The phrase 'freedom to undertake political action' could provide an effective means of appealing for popular support.

The only other initiative of note has come from the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, a left-wing pressure group in the party which has argued that it is essential to involve rank-and-file trade unionists and party members if the argument is to be won. So far, the LCC has called for the setting up of liaison committees between local Labour Parties and union branches and has encouraged the establishment of more Labour Party workplace branches. It has also organised a major conference in London for December 1.

the Tories may also have done the labour movement something of a backhanded long term favour

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Democracy

Part of the task will be to link the Tory attack on the democratic institutions of the labour movement with their assault on local government democracy and on civil liberties in general. As they cast their votes in next year's ballots, trade unionists will not only be influenced by campaigns within their organisations, but by the climate outside too. And, when the wider public realise that what is at stake is not just the self-interest of the labour movement, but a principle dear to liberal democracy – free competition between parties – then popular support could swing over as it did during the campaign to save the Greater London Council.

For, as has been argued:[7]

> 'the fact remains that no other organisations have appeared in British society which have emerged from the lives of (workers) . . . and which try actively to prosecute an interpretation of their interests where these conflict with others in the society. To advocate the end of all links between the Labour Party and the unions is nothing less than to advocate the end of political pluralism in Britain, for there is no other social cleavage within the society to support a major degree of party competition than that which is represented by the conflict between organised labour and capital.'

Whether by abolishing the GLC and the metropolitan counties; by rate-capping; by denying union membership at GCHQ; by oppressive official secrecy prosecutions; or by extending police powers, Thatcherism has made an offensive against democratic rights a major priority in its second term of office. But it may well be that they have provided the Left with its first substantial opening since 1979 to challenge Thatcherism's constant (albeit false) claim to monopolise the values of democracy and freedom. If this proves to be the case, then it could help considerably to undermine the ideological basis for the extra working class support which Thatcher managed to win in 1979 and hold on to in 1983.

In that sense, the ballots campaign will be seen in terms of a victory or defeat for Thatcherism. The Tories conceived the 1984 Act to deliver them a major ideological advance. It could become an equally major defeat if the whole labour movement mobilises, thus helping to turn the tide against the Right.

Ironically, the Tories may also have done the labour movement something of a backhanded long term favour. By instituting regular political fund ballots, they are effectively legitimising political activity and discussion within trade unions, and this could well prove the most lasting consequence of the legislation. By attacking political funds, they will force union leaders to give a priority to political education which, instead of being a luxury option, will become a necessity. And by altering the definition of political expenditure they may force unions which have traditionally been opposed to having political funds to set them up – which is the first step on to recognising a more political role, even if it does not initially result in affiliation to Labour.

And finally, by giving rank and file members a chance to participate directly in a key political decision, the Tories may have opened the way towards a much more active and democratic base of support for Labour in the working class. □

[7] Crouch pp202-203.

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The United States is about to go to the polls. And barring miracles, it will be Reagan for a second term. Why has Reagan been so successful? Are the reasons ephemeral, or are they more fundamental, namely the reordering of the political agenda and American society itself?

Reagan's American Dream

David Plotke

1984 Republican candidates, Ronald Reagan and George Bush.

1984 Democratic candidates, Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro.

'I think we've given the American people back their spirit. I think there is an optimism in the land and a patriotism.'
Ronald Reagan

As the November 6 election date approaches, Ronald Reagan and George Bush enjoy a wide lead.

Reagan's lead extends to all areas of the country and reaches most social groups. He is ahead in booming Western states and devastated Eastern industrial states. He leads in northern urban states, such as New York, and in Georgia and Alabama. Reagan leads among most social groups, though his margin increases with income.

With several weeks left before the election, the possibility of sudden shifts resulting in a Mondale victory still exists. In the first of the two presidential debates, Mondale improved his position, as he appeared more articulate than Reagan, and was more effective than he has usually been during the campaign. Yet his gain falls far short of the dramatic advances he needs.

Americans have had all year to get used to this developing situation, so the element of surprise has been dissipated. Yet a few years ago many political analysts in the US were predicting that Reagan's anticipated policy failures would have him on the ropes by now. And Reagan's popularity and good prospects for re-election may be a surprise outside the US, especially in countries where he has not been a very popular figure.

So there's some explaining to do: why does the Reagan-Bush campaign seem to be going so well? What does Reagan's ability to mount such a powerful bid for re-election say about the state of American politics?

Money and organisation

Those who oppose Reagan often prefer to think that his success has little to do with their own efforts or beliefs. This stance encourages many essentially apolitical explanations of why Reagan is doing well, and better than expected.

It is worth going through these explanations, however. They are partly right. And where they are wrong, they are characteristic responses of a Left put on the defensive by conservative political forces, not only in the US but in other countries.

One account of Reagan's success stresses that he benefits from his substantial institutional resources. Some resources come from his powers as incumbent, which allow him not only to dispense material benefits strategically (to regions or constituencies), but also to set the agenda of political debate.

Beyond the power of the presidency, Reagan's Republican Party is well-organised, well-funded, and efficient. Over the last decade, the Republican Party has become very effective in raising money and sustaining political networks and has far out-distanced the Democratic Party.

The Republican Party and Reagan also benefit from a shift in American politics toward greater reliance on electronic media and direct mail for political communication and organisation. These techniques require money, which the Republicans can produce, and they depend less on the local organisational forms – unions, community associations, and urban political machines – which were important for the New Deal Democratic Party.

Reagan's charm

Reagan's reception in Europe has been cool. Many Europeans – not just on the Left – are uncomfortable with his cowboy geniality, his affable belligerence, and his obvious indifference to detail. He seems naive, yet self-confident, optimistic and untroubled. He sometimes seems to certify clichés about an 'American personality' which is energetic, eager, unformed, and dangerous. These qualities are dismaying for many Americans. But seeming intensely 'American', even in dubious ways, is not

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an electoral liability in the United States.

Reagan's personal characteristics resonate with many cultural themes which Americans admire, or at least are attached to. He appears as a confident, strong leader, capable of setting a clear policy direction and making sure it is followed.

But Reagan's personal popularity can't be treated as an apolitical accident. It is tempting for those who oppose Reagan's policies to dismiss him as an actor, his speeches as scripts, his sincerity as a pose. Yet Reagan has been a very active and important figure in American politics for two decades, during which he was the governor of California, the nation's largest state, for two terms, played a major role in rebuilding the national Republican Party, campaigned endlessly for president in the 1970s, and served a term in that office. By contemporary standards he is an experienced political figure whose public persona is both a personal and a political fact. That it all seems to work is not just his good fortune, but a measure of the substantive political themes with which his political persona has become identified.

What about explaining Reagan's successes in terms of the failures of his opposition?

For centre and conservative Democrats, this is an unappealing line of argument. It is nonetheless partly right. The organisational weakness of the Democratic Party is an open secret. Beyond that, the party is riven with conflict among these tendencies: conservative Southern Democrats; neo-conservative Democrats who identify with the policies of the late Senator Henry Jackson of Washington, an advocate of domestic welfare spending and extensive military spending; a centrist liberalism represented by Walter Mondale; a 'neo-liberal' current symbolised in various forms by former Governor Jerry Brown of California and Senator Gary Hart of Colorado; and several different left tendencies, expressed in Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, the feminist movement, and sections of the trade unions.

> what leftists and liberals did not predict was that the recession would be followed by a sustained recovery

Democratic factionalism has been a problem for decades, however. Its effects are serious enough, but it becomes most severe when no single faction has either the organisational strength or the political vision even to impose a temporary unity on the others, much less reorganise and redirect the party. This lack of leadership reflects both institutional blockage and substantive political problems – not an intrinsically quarrelsome Democratic nature.

Direction and issues

Polls suggest that popular support for Reagan is weaker when measured on an issue-by-issue basis than when framed in terms of overall support. The temptation is to read the gap as an effect of Reagan's charm, or the volatility and self-indulgence of an electorate whose members have watched too much television.

Again, in small doses this account makes sense. The danger is that this view obscures the reality: Reagan's political success is rooted in large part in the course of the main political debates in the US of the last 15 years.

Issues don't necessarily work against Reagan. The disparity between his support on individual questions and his overall support is not just due to affection for him, but to a common judgment that

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despite disagreement on one point or another he is going in the right direction. This does not mean that Americans have eagerly lined up behind the full programme of Reagan, much less his far right allies in the Moral Majority. But he has taken major steps toward building a new consensus very different from the old Democratic consensus.

Even after giving due weight to Republican money and organisation, Democratic disorder, and Reagan's appeal, there is much left to explain in the popularity of an administration which many predicted would rouse massive popular opposition or fall of its own weight. Part of the answer – more than the Left likes to admit – lies in the course of political debate.

This debate – often muddy, unfair and polemical – has taken up issues of basic importance, many of which play major roles in the 1984 campaign. On most major issues, Reagan has done better than the Left imagines, or wishes to acknowledge, or than he deserves. Thus it is necessary though unpleasant to recognise that the Left has been engaged in a long debate and political conflict with Reagan and Reaganism. And Reagan seems to be winning.

How could this be so, given that many Reaganite positions seem outrageous, while Reagan and his supporters often display a very casual attitude toward argument and evidence? The truth is that some of Reagan's worst positions are not unpopular. Some of his opponents' claims about his policies have proved inaccurate in ways which strengthen his position. And the positions and programmes of the opposition – including the Left – are sometimes not very effective on any terms.

Economic recovery

1 *Left-liberals predicted that supply-side economics would be a joke, and Reagan's policies a disaster. These predictions seemed confirmed when Reagan presided over the most severe recession since the Second World War. Yet no matter who followed Carter, some sort of recession would have followed the inflationary burst of the late 1970s.*

What leftists and liberals did not predict was that the recession would be followed by a sustained recovery, one of the strongest since 1945 – and that this recovery would not ignite inflation. Recovery may not have occurred for the reasons Reagan claims, but it has happened. Inflation is under 5%, about a third of what it was in 1980. Unemployment, while still in the 7-8% range, is no higher than in 1980 and is still slowly declining. Surprisingly, productivity increases have been substantial, to the point that they may open the possibility of the recovery becoming a sustained expansion.

Here Reagan's situation differs from Thatcher's, who has presided over much greater economic decline. Reaganism does not promise an austerity that will cleanse and revive, but growth and prosperity in the near-term. His ability to deliver on substantial parts of that promise – despite the uneven distribution of the rewards of growth, and the dire conditions facing some groups, such as young black people and women who head households – strengthens him politically.

2 *Many predicted that Reagan's attack on social policy would yield popular discontent, and even lead to waves of active, mobilised opposition. Reagan has trimmed social programmes, sometimes very cruelly. Where the cuts have been less severe, this has often been due to the tempering influence of Democrats in Congress rather than Reagan's restraint.*

Yet Reagan's policies, when phrased in terms of cutting government spending, are relatively popular. They appeal to wide sections of the population who are taxed – and perceive themselves as over-taxed – to support social programmes. There is massive support for some core programmes, mainly social security, but social policy expenditures, especially welfare expenditures, are not popular. Reagan's defence against charges of cruelty has often been persuasive: he claims that reducing the tax burden provides immediate relief for most people, and encourages a new prosperity which will do more for the poor than welfarist social policy has done.

Reagan and the unions

3 *What about Reagan's opposition to the unions? His administration has been the most hostile to the labour movement of any in decades. Reagan fired an entire union, the federal air traffic controllers, when they struck early in his term. His National Labour Relations Board authored a series of decisions which constrain union activities and new organising.*

Reagan's policies have guaranteed him the relentless official opposition of most unions. Yet within the unions, a decreasing portion of the membership takes the political advice of its leaders. Where this advice is declined, it is most often the case that the members have moved politically to the right.

In reality, the unions are weak in national politics, outside of organisational fights within the Democratic Party. Taking them

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on, short of explicit attacks on the right of unions to exist *per se*, is not politically unpopular. The unions now include only about 20% of the labour force, and are getting weaker. They are widely viewed as in principle desirable but in reality as corrupt and narrow organisations, protecting their members at the expense of those who can't get union jobs and the economy as a whole. Thus Reagan's anti-labour stance has not hurt him significantly. (Anti-union efforts are not as prominent in Reaganism as in Thatcher's policies, perhaps because unions in the US are so much weaker.)

4 *What about Reagan's opposition to abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment?*

This is a weak point for Reagan's political project. His adamant anti-feminism has helped produce an unprecedented phenomenon: women now vote 10-15 points to the left of men. This is such a large gap that it causes problems for the administration, and even greater problems for Republicans trying to run on Reagan's coat-tails in state and local races.

Yet even here, Reagan's policies and stances are not a simple loss. He has stimulated great opposition, but much of it is from among those who would have opposed him even had he taken a more moderate approach. (This is not true for some middle-class and upper middle-class women who in the past might have supported liberal Republicans. Many of these women will vote against Reagan.) Yet his cultural and familial conservatism have enabled him to make inroads into traditional Democratic working-class and lower middle-class constituencies, both among Catholics and Protestants. And he has sustained the commitment of far right constituencies to his administration.

5 *Doesn't Reagan's belligerent foreign policy hurt him politically?*

Nuclear policy aside, Reagan has lost nothing here. He has managed to sound tough, without committing American troops to a sustained major military effort. Grenada was a quick win; Lebanon has been a policy failure, but not another Vietnam. In Central America, Reagan's policies have worried and sometimes angered large parts of the population. But he gives evidence of recognising a clear line, which he crosses at great political risk. This line divides economic and political support for various regimes (and even for clandestine armed groups, as in Nicaragua) from direct US military involvement on a significant scale.

Relations with the Soviet Union

6 *Finally, what of Reagan's nuclear policy, and his administration's terrible relations with the Soviet Union?*

As Reagan has helped create the gender gap, he has helped produce a new peace movement in the US and elsewhere. Nuclear issues have been a major source of political trouble.

Yet Reagan's basic stance of strong opposition to the Soviet Union is not at all politically unpopular. His campaign makes its case in these terms: while the rhetoric of Soviet-American relations is brutal, the actual number of places where a superpower confrontation is threatened has been reduced. The Soviet Union assails Reagan (and Reagan jokes that he never gets good notices from TASS) – but his policies make it cautious about military and political interventions. Thus, the argument goes, Reagan has increased stability and limited Soviet power through his clarity and determination to revive and employ American military and political strength.

When arms talks were discontinued, and no meetings between Soviet and American leaders were occurring, this line of argument could not overcome opposition to Reagan's course. Now, however, Reagan's meeting with Gromyko and the strikingly different tone of his major September speech to the United Nations have been emphasised by his campaign in claiming that his strategy actually worked – and that it's now appropriate to renew arms control negotiations from a new position of American strength. A critique of Democratic policies as leading to war through weakness has been made with such success that a previously large Democratic advantage has disappeared.

In sum, Reagan's policies are opposed vehemently by those who opposed them from the beginning. They find a surprisingly wide range of popular support, with around 40% of likely voters 'strongly supporting' the administration. And his policies are marginally acceptable for many who disagree with one or another aspect of Reagan's direction, but were more unhappy with Carter-Mondale, and not inclined to give Mondale another chance. Reagan's popularity is not a matter of media tricks and mirrors. He stands for reduced government spending and a tougher foreign policy stance, and both positions are now politically popular.

Yet through political argument and conflict, what is now popular can become less so. To acknowledge that Reagan's successes are political opens the possibility of reversing the current drift. While this view is more unsettling than ascribing Reagan's success to money or charm, it is not only more accurate, but more hopeful. In the long term, it is more profound and more realistic to imagine changing political opinions and redefining policies and programmes than negating Reagan's charm (or the appeal of other conservatives), or raising more money than the Republicans will be able to.

Democratic strengths

To win back a dominant position the Democratic Party would have to make progress on most of the above issues. Quite

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a bit of rethinking is necessary – some positions need to be reformulated in basic ways, others need to be reframed more persuasively. Sometimes it will be necessary to accept that a principled position should not be abandoned, yet now involves political costs. Debate over specifics – which positions should be changed, which reargued – may be an important part of the post-election scene within and around the Democratic Party (including the small socialist Left, which generally supports Mondale and Ferraro against Reagan).

Yet even if Mondale does lose, 1984 provides more than a legacy of failure for the Democrats.

First, Jesse Jackson's campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination was a political breakthrough. Jackson, a civil rights activist from the 1960s to the present, is the first black to wage a serious campaign for national office. His campaign, which won about 20% of the votes cast in Democratic primaries, raised issues about poverty and civil rights which for different reasons both Mondale and Reagan have downplayed. As well, Jackson's critique of American foreign policy, notably in Africa and Central America, greatly broadened this year's debate. His campaign mobilised millions of black voters, and will encourage state and local advances by not only black candidates but others on the left of the current political spectrum.

Second, the vice-presidential nomination of Geraldine Ferraro, a Congresswoman from New York, symbolises a major positive change. Ferraro's campaign has had its problems, and she has failed to sustain the initial burst of enthusiasm which greeted her nomination. Whatever the reasons for her difficulties, her presence, clearly expressing the new mobilisation of women as a political force, is one of the most important elements of the campaign, and has sometimes been inspiring. In combination, the Jackson and Ferraro efforts will certainly change the terms on which future candidates for national office are chosen, by both parties.

Third, the labour movement, enraged by Reagan, made an early decision to support Mondale, and poured resources into the effort. If Mondale were elected, there would be major changes away from the Reagan labour policies, and an improved climate for new union organising (which could not be much worse). The labour movement's leadership was somewhat sectarian in its support for Mondale in the Democratic primaries. But its intervention establishes a precendent of political engagement which is positive for subsequent elections, in a period when labour has been beaten badly in organising drives and contract negotiations.

Finally, the Democrats and allied efforts have produced major increases in voter registration. Low voting rates – only about 50% of those eligible voted in 1980 – have been a problem, as disproportionately Democratic social groups (especially among the poor) have displayed very low voting rates.

The context

With the election undecided, it's hard to gauge post-election prospects. Even so, there are many signs of trouble for Democrats and the Left.

To put the political problem in context: the socio-economic forms of the postwar period have been breaking up for more than a decade. Rather than yielding steady overall decline, however, the 1970s in the US was a mosaic of terrible decay in some economic sectors (mainly the postwar stalwarts such as automobiles and steel) and substantial growth in others (computers, electronics, services).

With the current recovery – likely to taper off, yet not certain to lead to another

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severe recession – the American economy and social structure are changing rapidly, through pressures originating in foreign competition and technological innovation in the US. Growth means the creation of new socio-economic groups, without pre-given political identities.

The New Deal alignments have broken apart both because some of the groups which made them up have changed political course, and because new groups have taken shape. In this setting, the Republicans are now leading in the war to put a new set of political alignments in place. Their aim is to become the party of growth, opportunity, and discipline, especially the party of the growing West and South. Reaganites hope that the Republicans will be the party not just of big business, but of small business and technical and professional workers, even the party of skilled blue-collar workers. The Republicans are fighting to define themselves as the party of dynamic regions and sectors, and in doing so to define the Democrats as a backward, anti-modernising party whose policies would stifle socio-economic development and harm all but a handful of protected interests.

While these new identities are not yet achieved, several signs of their possible accomplishment have appeared. There is a significant shift of party identification underway, which though volatile seems to have brought the Republicans to within a few % points of the Democrats, closer than they have been for decades.

Thus the voter registration efforts noted above have produced less of an upsurge in registration than hoped. It has been harder to persuade people to register than was thought; the campaigns, while productive, have not met armies of eager non-voters waiting to cast their ballots against Reagan. And Democrats have not been the only new registrants, as there has been a major increase in Republican registration. In many states, such as California, new Republican registrants have exceeded Democrats.

In a period of flux, when old political identities and the socio-economic groups to which they were connected have been weakened, 'natural' Democrats don't exist. People have to be persuaded to choose one or another political option, among even the most likely social groups.

The dilemmas of interest-group politics

The main strengths of the Democratic campaign have been its mobilisation around sectoral demands and interests, especially those of women and blacks. These strengths are ironically linked to the party's political weakness. It doesn't seem to stand for much beyond its inclusiveness regarding interest groups, and what it does stand for isn't very new or popular.

Mondale's candidacy was vulnerable to attack in the Democratic primaries on the grounds that it had no centre, and merely reflected the balance of forces among competing groups whose support he sought. So, the argument goes, a Mondale presidency would be paralysed, lacking the means to govern even the groups who elected it. Against this interest-group approach, Reagan has posed a vague but powerful collection of themes centred on economic growth and opportunity and national security.

there is no immediate possibility that a socialist identity and vocabulary will bind popular constituencies together

This dynamic underlines a central problem not only for centrist Democrats such as Mondale, but everyone to his left as well. The strength of the American popular Left lies mainly in its diversity, in a rich array of popular movements and organisations with their own strategies and interests. No single group – the labour movement, the peace movement, the feminist movement, the black movement, the gay movement etc, – can claim to be the natural strategic or moral centre of the forces of opposition to Reagan. All have their agendas, and the power to win parts of them.

Yet the carefully-guarded autonomy of these movements means problems in developing a coherent political force which can engage Reaganism in a serious national debate about the future. It is very hard even to assemble a workable coalition for the most immediate electoral purposes from among the movements and interest groups of the popular Left. And a temporary electoral coalition lacks the strength and durability to pose a general alternative, as well as appearing vulnerable to the 'special interest' charge which is so effective even against very large movements in the US.

In a country where socialist politics has not been a significant national current for many decades, there is no immediate possibility that a socialist (or labourist) identity and vocabulary will bind popular constituencies together. This may have some advantages, inasmuch as socialist language can function to encourage hollow affirmations of loyalty to principle.

Yet the question of what should be the unifying language, programme and vision of a democratic politics in an emerging post-industrial capitalism stands out all the more sharply and urgently.

Prospects

Recent polls promise a Reagan landslide on the scale of Lyndon Johnson's humiliaton of Barry Goldwater in 1964. The election will probably be closer than that. Reagan's performance in the first debate was uninspired; Mondale is at his best when far behind.

Barring unprecedented shifts, a Mondale victory seems out of reach. The question then becomes the size of Reagan's victory. A modest Reagan victory will leave the shape of politics in the balance, with Reagan constrained, for example, to pursue seriously the arms talks with the Soviet Union he has proposed. A modest Reagan victory would also limit Reagan's freedom to use far right ideological criteria in making new appointments to the Supreme Court in the next four years.

The larger the margin, the more likely that the Reagan administration will have a working majority in the House of Representatives, along with an actual majority in the Senate. And the larger the margin, the more Reagan can claim a mandate for his political preferences, even for those which are not especially popular, such as his views on abortion. A Reagan landslide would provide the basis for consolidating a durable conservative regime for the remainder of the century. And it would probably cause many on the Left to abandon any real effort to reshape national politics in favour of purely local efforts, while others would be tempted by sectarian ideological currents which always provide comforting rationalisations for defeat.

This prospect, of a Reagan landslide and a Republican realignment, is most to be feared by those who oppose Reagan's policies. Yet it is one which can be prevented, even in the brief period which remains before the election. And if Reaganite dreams for a new era are blocked, either by narrowing Reagan's victory or at best defeating him, the chances for seriously rethinking the Left's programmes and principles will be much better, as the endlessly consuming task of combatting individual Reaganite policies and programmes will have been partially accomplished. □

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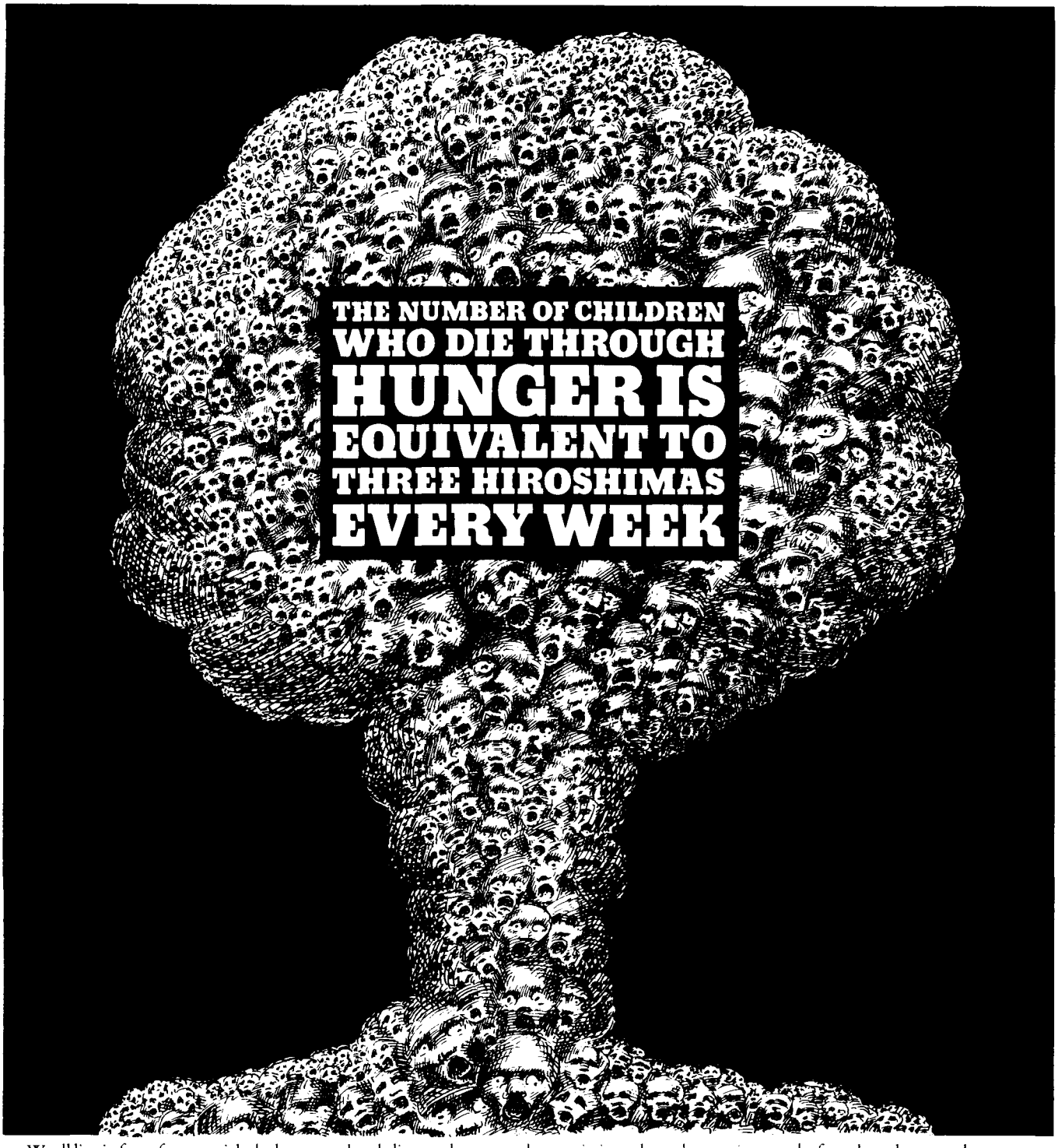

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It is, perhaps, provoking pangs of envy among those politicians on the Left who immediately attacked the civil service for sabotaging the Labour administration when the Callaghan government fell in 1979. Tony Benn was among them, so was Michael Meacher, though the responsibility lay mainly with their own ministerial colleagues. For example, it was Callaghan who told Edmund Dell, the Trade Secretary, to instruct his civil servants not to distribute policy papers to Meacher, his 'Bennite' junior minister.

Many Labour politicians would have been delighted to see their government take on the mandarins with the sort of confidence Mrs Thatcher has demonstrated. Mrs Thatcher (and David Owen agrees with her) regards the traditional civil service as an over-protected interest group, an obstacle in her way.

A new breed of managers

The civil service, of course, is in the direct firing line, a central target of specific policies and priorities of Thatcherism. One of the first priorities, and one that both reflected populist, poujadist, ideology and was simple to achieve — there is fat in any bureaucracy — was to cut the total number of civil servants from 732,000 when Mrs Thatcher came to power to 630,000 five years later. This target was, in the event, surpassed, with proportionally more cuts in the most senior ranks. The Government then confidently announced a new target of 593,000 by April 1988. The initial 630,000 target was an arbitrary one, virtually plucked out of the air. Every Whitehall department was asked to cut their number of civil servants, with the exception of the Home Office, which is responsible for law and order. Decisions were taken, irrespective of need or demand for services. And though the Government could refer to its passion for privatisation, it was not clear whether this was a cause or a symptom of its cuts programme.

The Government wants to introduce what it describes as private sector criteria into the civil service. That includes pay based on individual merit as opposed to pay based simply on rank. While this may have the advantage of abandoning the traditional bureaucratic reliance on Buggins' turn, it raises the potentially sensitive political question of how 'individual merit' is defined. The Thatcher administration has also abandoned the tradition that the Government should aim for good employer practice as an example to the private sector — witness the refusal to consult GCHQ staff about its ban on unions there.

Against this background and with these priorities, Mrs Thatcher wants to promote a new breed of managers to the top ranks of the civil service. Cost consciousness and the attributes of the accountant rather than intellectual ability will be the key to promotion; financial control is regarded as more important than the ability to prepare well-argued briefs, with all the available options and all the consequences of a particular policy proposal carefully laid out. Above all — and this reflects her impatience with debate and her intolerance of opposition — Mrs Thatcher demands total loyalty and commitment, asking if a candidate for promotion is 'one of us.' While she rids her Cabinet of doubters, she takes a close personal interest in senior civil service appointments — she insisted, against the advice of Sir Robert Armstrong, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Home Civil Service, on appointing Peter Middleton as permanent secretary to the Treasury, and appointed Sir Clive Whitmore, her principal private secretary, to the key post of permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence.

The civil service outlook

For Thatcherism has little time for the prevailing ethos of the mandarinate. The higher reaches of the civil service are still dominated by Oxbridge-educated (though more are from grammar schools than fee-paying ones) arts graduates. They are well-read, tend to be bland and cynical. In an essay on 'The Professional Ethic of the Administrator', Mr Richard Wilding, author of highly successful Greek and Latin primers, a former Treasury mandarin and now official head of the Office of Arts and Libraries, wrote in 1979: 'It is absolutely necessary to pursue today's policy with energy; it is almost equally necessary, in order to survive, to withhold from it the last ounce of commitment.' This is a safety valve for civil servants who, looking over their shoulder at the next election, do not want to be too closely identified with the current administration. But this lack of total commitment is anathema to Mrs Thatcher, the conviction politician.

This attitude among senior civil servants who look forward to a 40-year safe career — they are, in some ways, the permanent politicians — leads to a cynical detachment. The mandarins may be intellectual, but many are also intellectually corrupt. Some would call it realism. Asked what lessons he had learnt after 34 years in Whitehall, Sir Kenneth Clucas, who retired as former permanent secretary at the Department of Trade in 1982, said: 'Do not put your trust in panaceas. I am one of those who believe that the problems of the economy in this country are fairly deep-seated. They go back at least to 1870'.

His contemporary, Sir Leo Pliatzky, former second permanent secretary at the Treasury, puts it another way. Successive British governments, he said, not long after Mrs Thatcher won power, have gravitated towards the centre, not as a result of pressure from the Whitehall establishment but because of *practical* constraints imposed on ministers by economic and social circumstances.

The British, he said after he retired in 1981, are in the main resistant to change — an unsaid justification of the mandarins' significant power, the power to delay. This resistance reflects a fundamental 'political stability', but also means that the British are slow to innovate.

It is no surprise that many senior civil servants support the Alliance, the perceived centre between two 'extremes', based on a kind of consensus. It is

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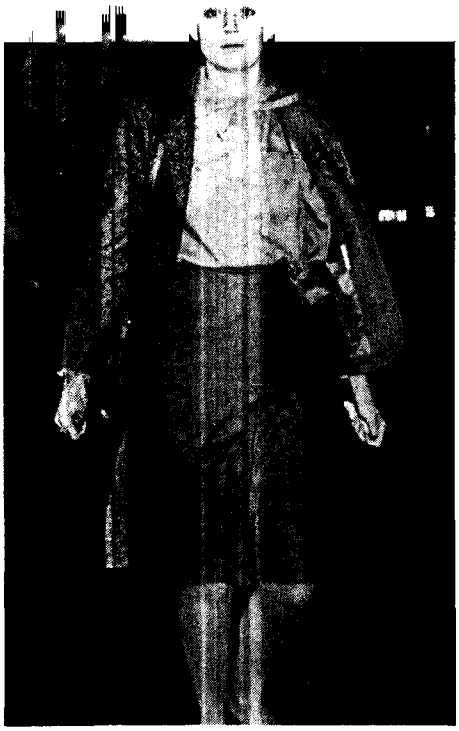

Sarah Tisdall.

appropriate that Roy Jenkins, one of the Social Democratic leaders, has said he scorns 'manifesto-itis' and that one of the party's early slogans read: 'take the politics out of politics'.

Notions of consensus

Whitehall is not monolithic; each department has its own well-established consensus. The Department of Employment, for example, has always wanted to promote conciliation; the Department of Education and Science has consistently been opposed to the expansion of higher education through universities; the Department of Trade (now merged with Industry) has been anti-protectionist and dominated by free-marketeers, while the Department of Industry has been more interventionist. The Foreign Office is thoroughly pro-EEC and senior diplomats have publicly said they would resign if Britain left the Common Market. There is also a broad consensus across Whitehall on specific issues: in favour of a kind of incomes policy, for instance, or — now — against the Trident missile system.

But behind this, there is another definition of consensus. Sir Antony Part, former permanent secretary at the Department of Industry, described it carefully to BBC viewers. 'The civil service', he said, 'always hopes that it's influencing ministers to the common ground. Now that's not to say influencing them towards some piece of ground which the civil service has itself constructed; it is the civil service trying to have a sense of what can succeed for Britain, and trying to exercise its influence on ministers to try and see that they capture the common ground with their ideas, from whatever origin they start'. Sir Antony drew a distinction between 'the common ground' and 'the centre'. The latter, he argued, is literally the half-way point between two poles; the former is the ground 'on which, or to which, the majority of people can be persuaded to move'. He added pointedly: 'you have to remember that in recent times neither of the main political parties has been elected by a majority of the electorate'.

Senior civil servants, in common with some judges, have thus developed a definition of consensus and the 'public interest' that is in no way synonymous with 'the majority' as expressed by the largest party in the Commons. To whom, then, are civil servants loyal? Thirty-five years ago, Sir Edward Bridges, then permanent secretary at the Treasury, argued that civil servants should be concerned primarily with the 'continued well-being of the state'. Sir William Armstrong, Heath's Head of the Civil Service, said that officials should be concerned more with 'the continuity of the realm than for the success of party'. Civil servants, as the Government has itself argued in the GCHQ case, are servants of the Crown and have no contract with their particular department or minister. Clive Ponting, the senior Ministry of Defence official charged under the Official Secrets Act with sending documents about the sinking of the Belgrano to an MP says: 'In my view, a civil servant must ultimately place his loyalty to parliament and the public interest above his obligation to the interests of the government of the day.'

The Ponting case

In what will be a test case, he is charged under a section of the Act which states that a Crown servant does not commit an offence if he communicates official information to 'a person to whom he is authorised to communicate it, or a person to whom it is in the interest of the State to communicate it'. This raises the key question of whether the duty and loyalty of a civil servant is to the Crown, or the State — or to the Crown in Parliament — rather than to ministers alone and above all.

The code of ethics for civil servants in the US states that officials must 'put loyalty to the highest moral principles and to country above loyalty to persons, party or government department'. More and more civil servants — and especially those of a younger, less deferential, generation — are questioning the conventional view that they owe their highest loyalty to their minister. These doubts are compounded by an administration which demands total loyalty and commitment, whose policies work directly against the interests of civil servants and whose spokespersons, and Mrs Thatcher above all, say they despise consensus politics. The doubts are compounded, too, by the *way* the Government takes decisions — with no consultations with interested parties: the ban on unions at GCHQ is one example. What horrified senior civil servants most during talks with the Government over a no-disruption deal at GCHQ was the Prime Minister's statement that the gap between the two sides was one 'that cannot be bridged by words', and by her suggestion that membership of a trade union automatically meant that GCHQ staff had divided loyalties. Mandarins have laid great store by consultation with interested groups before decisions are taken, and also by what they refer to as 'rational argument'.

The Government argues that if it consults, its proposals will be leaked. Civil servants argue that leaks are a symptom rather than a cause of excessive secrecy. Traditionally secretive themselves, a growing number of civil servants believe that it is the lesser of two evils, that more openness could and should lead to a more informed opinion, to more rational decision-making, and to a return to consensus based on debate to counter divisiveness based on arbitrary action. This is the struggle between 'informed opinion' — to which the elitist civil servants refer — and Thatcher's 'populism'.

Meanwhile, by its attitudes, ideology and power of patronage, the Thatcher administration is in danger of politicising the civil service by stealth: by stealth because its pragmatism, Britain's unwritten constitution and constitutional myths — such as the notion that ministers are alone responsible to parliament for the activities of their officials — prevent an open, honest debate about the fundamental issues at stake. It must be preferable to come clean. Why not adopt something akin to the French 'cabinet' system? Then, far from suppressing the civil liberties of those civil servants who do not agree with the government on everything, ministers could pick their own advisers. And as for divided loyalties, what would Mrs Thatcher think of this: Anicet Le Pors was a senior civil servant in the French Treasury responsible for economic forecasting during the 1960s — under a right-wing government. At the same time he was an active leader of the French Communist trade union, the CGT. In 1981 Mitterand appointed him Minister for the Civil Service and for Administrative Reforms. □

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Where does the Left stand on the state? Straightforward. . . or is it? Not any longer. Ten years ago, the Left was broadly for state intervention and state agencies – of the appropriate kind. But postwar experience, and Thatcherism, are forcing a major rethink.

The State~

Socialism's Old Caretaker

Stuart Hall

MY AIM HERE is to explore an issue which is central to the strategy for the renewal of the socialist project, about which, however, I detect considerable confusion among socialists. This is the issue of *the state*. Now a great deal has been said about the role of the capitalist state by the Left, especially in recent times. It has almost acquired the status of a fashionable political topic. My purpose is not to review this already complex literature, but to come at the problem from a slightly different angle. I believe that the status of the state in current thinking on the Left is *very problematic*. Many socialists now stand in a very different place, on the question of the state, than they would have taken up ten or twenty years ago. And yet, I believe that we have not fully confronted or explained to ourselves why we have changed our minds or how this new thinking about the state is likely to influence strategies for the Left.

I am well aware that this kind of exploration is a dangerous exercise. One of our present dilemmas on the Left is the habit of thinking that we *already know* what the content and future of socialism is. We talk of socialism as if it were an already completed agenda: the script of a play which is already written and only waiting for someone to put it on stage. Of course, there is a tradition of socialist thought and struggle to draw on. But, tradition is a tricky concept, especially for the Left; a two-edged sword, more diverse and contradictory in reality than we make it appear when we construct it retrospectively. Our thinking about socialism must also reflect the history and experience of socialism as it actually exists – with all its vicissitudes. It must also ground itself in current realities, take the pressure of our time, reflect the world around us in order to transcend it. Paradoxically, socialism will perish unless it is able to grow out of the very soil of modern capitalism, which despite everything, is still expanding, still revolutionising the world in contradictory ways.

I do not, therefore, believe that what 'we have always thought about the state' on the Left will necessarily *do* for the next ten decades; or that posing ourselves difficult questions is necessarily a sign of the weakening of faith. We should leave Faith to The Believers. Indeed, that other way – socialism as an already finished project – is one of the most powerful sources of, and an excuse for, that profound sectarianism which has always had a strong presence on the Left and which I detect rising like the smog once again, as those who dare to put a question mark over our received wisdoms are instantly accused of treason, labelled as the enemy, or dismissed as 'pink professors misleading the Left' (in Tariq Ali's recent, immortal phrase) and despatched into outer darkness.

So why the problem?

So, braving the terrors of excommunication from the newly appointed guardians of orthodoxy, let us pose once more the question of where we stand on the question of the state. It is not difficult to see why the state has become problematic in recent years. This must reflect, on the one hand, our response to the whole experience of 'actual-existing socialism' where, instead of progressively withering away, the state has become a gigantic, swollen, bureaucratic force, swallowing up almost the whole of civil society, and imposing itself (sometimes with tanks), in the name of The People, on the backs of the people. Who, now, can swallow without a gigantic gulp the so-called temporary, passing nature of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? On the other hand, the very same period, since the end of World War II, has witnessed a parallel, gigantic expansion of the state complex within modern capitalism, especially in Western Europe, with the state playing an increasingly interventionist or regulative role in more and more areas of social life. It has become far and away the largest single employer of labour, and acquired a dominant presence in every sector of daily existence. What are we to make of *that* unexpected development, never adequately predicted in the classical Marxist literature?

Even more difficult to work out is, what is our attitude towards this development? On the one hand, we not only defend the welfare side of the state, we believe it should be massively expanded. And yet, on the other hand, we feel there is something deeply anti-socialist about how this welfare state functions. We know, indeed, that it is experienced by masses of ordinary people, in the very moment that they are benefiting from it, as an intrusive managerial, bureaucratic force in their lives. However, if we go too far down *that* particular road, whom do we discover keeping us company along the road but – of course – the Thatcherites, the new Right, the free market 'hot gospellers', who *seem* (whisper it not too loud) to be saying rather similar things about the state. Only they are busy making capital against us on this very point, treating widespread popular dissatisfactions with the modes in which the beneficiary parts of the state function as fuel for an anti-Left, 'roll back the state' crusade. And where, to be honest, do *we* stand on the issue? Are we for 'rolling back the state' – including the welfare state? Are we for or against the management of the whole of society by the state? Not for the first time, Thatcherism here catches the Left on the hop – hopping from one uncertain position to the next, unsure of our ground.

Perhaps it might help if we knew how we got into this dilemma. How *did* we get here? This is a vast topic in its own right, and I propose to look at only four aspects here. First, how did the British Left become so wedded to a particular conception of socialism through state management, the essence of what I want to call 'statism' or a 'statist' conception of social-

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ism? Secondly, I want to sketch some of the reasons why the very expansion of the state, for which so many on the Left worked so hard, turned out in practice to be a very contradictory experience. Third, I want to confront head on the confusion caused on the Left by the 'libertarianism' of the Right – the way Thatcherism has exploited the experience of welfare statism and turned it to the advantage of the new Right. Finally, I want to consider some aspects of the changing social and economic relationships today which have influenced spontaneous attitudes on the Left – what I call the growth of a left libertarianism. In conclusion, I can only roughly indicate some directions in which our thinking needs to be developed.

The history

First, how did the British Left get so deeply embedded in a statist conception of socialism? After all, it was not – as many people imagine – always like that. The state did not have that central, all-pervasive role in early socialist thinking. Marx and Engels understood the role of the capitalist state in developing a whole social and political order around a particular mode of exploitation and spoke briefly but vividly about the need to destroy it in its existing form. But their thinking about the *future* role of the state in the transition to socialism was extremely sketchy. Other radical currents of thought in British socialism were, if anything, more anti-state than pro-state in their general tendency. Even in the key period, between the revival of socialism in the 1880s right through to the 1920s and the emergence of the Labour Party in its modern constitutionalist form as *the* majority party politically representing the working classes, a statist-oriented brand of socialism within Labourism and the labour movement, had to contend with many other currents, including of course the strong syndicalist currents before and after World War I, and the ILP's ethical Marxism later with their deep antipathy to Labour's top-downwards, statist orientation. One of the many tricks which the retrospective construction of Tradition on the Left has performed is to make the triumph of Labourism over these other socialist currents – the result of a massive political struggle, in which the ruling classes played a key role – appear as an act of natural and inevitable succession.

And yet, it was precisely in this critical period – between 1880s and the 1920s – when the parameters of British politics for the following 50 years were set for the first time, that statism took root in British political culture. In those days, what we now call 'statism' went under the title of 'collectivism'. What is crucial for our analysis is the fact that there were *many* collectivisms. 'Collectivism' was a highly contradictory formation, composed of different strands, supported in different ways by the Right, the Centre and the Left – if, for convenience, we can use those somewhat anachronistic labels. Collectivism was regarded by many sections on the Right, and by some influential sectors of the leading classes, as *the* answer to Britain's declining fortunes. The country – the new collectivists believed – required a programme of 'national regeneration'. This could only be undertaken if the old shibboleths of laissez-faire were finally abandoned and the state came to assume a far greater role of organic leadership in society. A 'populist' bloc of support, they believed, could be won amongst the dominated classes for such a project, provided the latter were 'squared' by state pensions and other Bismarck-type benefits. This was the programme of both the 'social imperialist' and the 'national efficiency' schools, and of the highly authoritarian populist politics associated with them. And though they did not carry their programme in detail, they were extremely influential in pioneering the shift in the allegiance of British capital from its former commitment to laissez-faire, to its newer link with a certain type of capitalist state interventionism.

Statism equals socialism

There is no space to deal with the links between collectivism and the 'centre', but it is a critical link in the story to remember that it was also on this very question of 'the state' that the 'old' Liberalism transmuted itself into the 'new' Liberalism: and that the new Liberalism was, in its own time, the pioneer of the thinking which lay behind the early installment of the welfare state (in the 1906-11 Liberal administration) and, in our time, is really the political force which created that space in British politics which we would now call 'social democracy'.

But the key factor for our purposes was the progress which collectivism made, under essentially Fabian inspiration, inside the labour movement and in the Labour Party. In this period Fabianism established its ascendancy as *the* philosophy of socialism for Labour. Collectivism became, to be blunt, what the Webbs and their many followers *meant* by socialism. That is, progressive legislation, social welfare, a measure of redistributive justice, pioneered through the state by a political elite legislating on behalf of the working classes, (who were required to elect 'their government' to office but who were, of course, too inexpert to rule on their own behalf); resulting in a gigantic state complex, administering more and more of society in the interest of social efficiency, where the experts and the bureaucrats would exercise a 'benevolent dictatorship' through the state, servicing society's many and complex needs. It was in this formative period that the statist conception of socialism became rivetted in place, as the dominant current within Labourism and the British Left.

We have no space to sketch the long, torturous route which led from the emergence of this statist conception of socialism in the 1920s to the much-transformed reality of the modern state and state interventionism as we know it since post-1945. Suffice it to say that the path from one to the other was by no means straightforward. Nevertheless, the welfare state was constructed after 1945 on those earlier foundations, and is rightly regarded as the crowning achievement of the postwar Labour government, the high tide of the spirit of popular 'war radicalism', and the most advanced achievement of the reformist tradition of British social democracy.

The logic behind this development in the second half of the twentieth century is not difficult to understand, even though we may not subscribe wholeheartedly to it nowadays. The argument ran as follows: capitalism has a thrust, a logic of its own – the logic of private property, capital accumulation, possessive individualism and the free market. This logic 'worked', in the sense that it created the modern capitalist world – with, of course, its necessary 'costs': exploitation, poverty, insecurity for the masses, class inequality, the many inevitable victims of its 'successes'. The Left, it seemed, had only one alternative: to break the 'logic of the market' and construct society around an alternative logic – a socialist one. But to do this, it needed an alternative centre of power, an opposing rallying-point, to that of capital and the market. This opposing force was *the state*. Either the state could be used to make inroads into the 'logic of the market', to modify its excesses, abate its extremes, graft alternative goals (eg, needs not profits) on to the system, impose a redistributive logic on the unequal ways in which capitalism 'naturally' distributes its goods and resources: this was the *reformist* alternative. Or else, the power of capital

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and the market, installed behind the capitalist state, had to be actively broken – 'smashed' – and the major social processes 'socialised' or made public by being progressively absorbed and taken over into the state: this was the revolutionary road. Both, it is clear, involved, to different degrees, massive inroads into the 'logic' of the market by expanding the role of the state.

The two great blocs

I believe this crudely drawn political landscape, blocked out into its two, great, opposed 'continents' – the domain of capital and the market versus the domain of the logic of social needs, imposed through the state – is how the vast majority of us first entered into basic political thinking. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that these remain the two fundamental formations in British political culture – more inclusive, in a way, than the traditional division into Left and Right. They have helped to set the parameters within which British politics have fluctuated since the turn of the century. An essential part of the 'historic compromise' between the classes struck in the interwar period was the new balance established between 'state' and 'civil society'. On this basic 'settling of the boundaries' much of the stability of Britain as a capitalist democracy has depended. It was the shifting of these boundaries, in some sectors, away from the free play of market forces, and closer to the reform-through-the-state pole, which constituted the 'revolution' of the Keynesian welfare state and the post-1945 settlement. This new consensus, basically, lasted up to the advent of Thatcherism in the mid-70s. It is this 'settling of boundaries' which the new Right challenged. Restoring the free market principle to its former ascendancy is once again the fulcrum of politics, the key dividing line between Right and Left. That is why the question of the Left's attitude to the state now matters so profoundly.

All this makes it sound as if the balance of forces on this question has been steadily moving in the reformist direction. Why, then, has this development of the state been so problematic for the Left? One reason is that the state has gone on expanding and developing powered, so to speak, by *both* the Right and the Left. We still speak of the 'capitalist state'. But, in fact, we no longer behave as if it had single, monolithic class character. The Left, despite its rhetoric, has *its* part of the state too: the welfare state, which distributes benefits to the needy; serves society's needs; redistributes resources to the less well-off; provides amenities – and all on a universalistic basis, rather than on the market terms of 'ability to pay'. The NHS is the classic example. Despite its dependence on the private sector and the inroads into it made by private medicine, the NHS is still generally regarded and experienced as having broken the logic which connected health and medical care to wealth and the private ability to pay, and installed in its place the idea of medical need served by a universal provision. The history of Nye Bevan's struggles to install the NHS demonstrate, not only how bitterly the market forces resisted this inroad into their territory, but how impossible it would have been without an alternative centre, capable of organising a materially different system of provision – the state.

How could anyone who understood the material difference which this has made in the lives of countless ordinary people regard this development as contrary to the logic of socialism? We – rightly – want to see *more* of this, not less: more aspects of life organised on a similar principle. The Social Affairs Unit of the Centre for Policy Studies, the Thatcherite 'think tank', proposed in its pamphlet, not simply to cut back the welfare state on pragmatic grounds of cost but to 'break the spell' of the welfare state. And those boys – Sir Keith Joseph's shock troops masquerading as an independent research unit – know what they are doing. This centrality of the state to the Left is not confined to the area of welfare and benefits. We have tended to think that the nationalisation measures of the 1940s and 1950s and the Keynesian interventions in economic life, which increased rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, failed, not because they went too far, but because they did not go far enough. The Left is still basically wedded to a *positive* view of the state's role in socialist construction.

The two-edged state

Matters are not quite so simple. Few areas of the welfare state are as clear cut in their positive image as the NHS. Also the welfare and benefit side is not the only form in which the state has expanded in post-war society. We have seen the parallel expansion of the *warfare* state, too. And of the repressive, 'policing' aspects of the state: the state as coercive agent, defending the social order, punishing the deviant, extending its surveillance into civil society, disciplining the citizenry on to the straight and narrow, its operations increasingly shrouded in secrecy, beyond all normal forms of accountability. The 'Orwellian' state is alive and well, not only in Eastern European socialist democracies, but in Western European class democracies, alongside the welfare state. The state which gives out benefits also snoops on its recipients. Then there is the size and scale of the administrative side of the state, coupled with its bureaucratic mode of operation. People, when they are being 'done good to' by the state, increasingly *experience* it, in reality, as being 'put in their place' by it: by 'experts' who always know better, or state servants who seem oblivious to the variety of actual needs on the other side of the counter. The feeling is very deep that the *way* the welfare state works makes people into passive, greedy, dependent *clients* much of the time, rather than people claiming rights from a state which is supposed to be *their* state, representing them against the logic of the market.

Then there is the awareness that welfare states have become general throughout capitalist systems, with levels of benefit which have long since outstripped ours, and performing functions not only imposed on capital by the working class but necessary to the survival of capital. Free secondary education is, after all, *both* a long standing radical demand *and* a reform

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imposed on the idea of an educational market place *and* the degree of training and skilling a modern capitalist system requires. The welfare-reformist and the reproductive aspects of the state are increasingly difficult to distinguish. As state functions multiply, so more of us are working in state-related jobs. The changing composition of the working class and the changing pattern of industrial conflict have moved increasingly to these contested sites within the state. Even there we are aware of the *double-sided* character of our work. The slogan which most accurately expresses our dilemma and captures this contradictory reality is 'In And Against The State'. Increasing numbers of us are, regularly, *both*.

New Right libertarianism

This brings us to the 'libertarianism' of the new Right. Because it is exactly this contradictory experience of the state on which Thatcherism capitalised. It rooted itself in these dissatisfactions, and inflected them into a whole broadside against the very principle of welfare *as such*. The new Right harnesses these popular discontents to its cause, converted a dislike of the bureaucratic features of statism into a full-scale assault on the 'creeping tide of socialism' and the 'nanny state'. On these negative foundations it built the new positive gospel of the market as the universal provider of goods and of The Good; launched the savaging of public expenditure as a testament to Virtue; initiated the privatisation 'roll back'; and raised the war-cry of Freedom and its identity with the free market. The new Right presented itself as the only party committed to oppose the exponential growth of the state, its penetration into every corner of life. This was one of the key ways in which Thatcherism cut into the territory of the traditional Left, disorganised its base and made itself 'popular'.

The problem for the Left is that the dissatisfactions with the state are real and authentic enough – even if Thatcherism then mis-describes and mis-explains them. Thatcherism did not invent them – even if its remedies for the problem are fictitious. Further, *it* exposed a weakness, a critique, of the existing system which the Left had made too little of: the deeply *undemocratic* character of state-administered socialism. Most disconcerting of all, this revealed that the Left and the new Right share, on this question, some of the same ground!

This was particularly disconcerting because the Left believes that ideology marches in exclusive blocks of ideas, each block attached to its appropriate class or political position. It is therefore extremely odd to find the Left sharing with 'the class enemy' a critique of statism – even if, when the conclusions from that critique are drawn, the two sides radically part company. Of course, the problem here lies in the fact that ideology does *not* function in blocks. The idea of liberty, on which the whole anti-state philosophy was predicated, does not belong exclusively to the Right. They appropriated a certain version of it, linked it with other reactionary ideas to make a whole 'philosophy' and connected it into the programme and the forces of the Right. They made the idea of Freedom equivalent to and dependent on the 'freedom *of the market*' – and thus necessarily opposed to the idea of Equality. But freedom or liberty – in the wider sense of social emancipation – has always been a key element in the philosophy of the Left. Within this chain of ideas, emancipation *depends on* equality of condition. It is the equation with the market and possessive individualism which limits it. So what the Left urgently needs is to reappropriate the concept of freedom and give it its real expression within the context of a deepening of democratic life as a whole. The problem is that *this* socialist conception of Freedom is not compatible with – is in fact deeply undermined by – the idea of a state which takes over everything, which absorbs all social life, all popular energies, all democratic initiatives, and which – however benevolently – governs society *in place of* the people.

Choice

Perhaps we can all agree about 'emancipation'. It has a resonant feel to it, and touches very deep chords – as the new Right correctly understood. But what about another, trickier aspect of Freedom: the question of *choice*? I am not sure the idea of 'choice' has so far played a very central role in thinking on the Left. And yet the most widespread and basically correct 'image' of actual-existing socialism among ordinary working people is the drab lack of diversity, the omnipresence of planned sameness, the absence of choice and variety. Our concept of socialism has been dominated by images of scarcity. The trouble is that on the question of choice, capitalism and the free market seem so far to have the best tunes. But *is* the idea of choice, which is intrinsic to the whole critique of statism, an *essentially* reactionary, right-wing capitalist idea?

I suspect this is partly a generational matter. Socially, culturally, in everyday economic life, younger people set enormous store by choice and diversity. And they see as the principal enemies of diversity *both* big, corporate capital *and* the big state. They know what Thatcherite economists do not seem to know – that the maximisation of popular choice does *not* flourish in the storehouse of corporate capital, with its carefully calculated marketing and financing strategies. And they do not naturally associate it with the equally corporatist 'bureaucratic' modes of operation of the state. But, unfortunately for the Left, they *have* found a measure of choice in what we can only call the inter-

new left review 147

Stuart Hall's prescient studies of Thatcherism have furnished the Left with crucial reference points for understanding British politics. In NLR 147 Hall's approach is examined and criticised by *Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley and Tom Ling.*

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stices of the market. At the small end of the market, where the big battalions and competition to the death do not entirely dominate, small initiatives sometimes have a chance, and a degree of entrepreneurship can create openings, or recognise a new need, even a new *social* need, and experiment to a degree with satisfying it. I certainly don't mean to paint a rosy picture of the degree of openness which exists here: *all* markets are constrained above all by inequality. But most of the innovatory trends in everyday life with which younger people spontaneously identify – in music, clothes, styles, the things they read and listen to, the environments they feel comfortable in – operate on what one can only call an 'artisan capitalism' basis. These things are in constant danger of being regulated out of existence by the state or ripped off by the big commercial providers.

Left libertarianism

Nevertheless, inevitably, the actual daily cultural experience of diversity has come to be identified with a certain conception, or rather, a certain experience of *the market*. And this is by no means confined to non-political people. Culturally, where would the Left be today without initiatives like *City Limits* or a thousand other small, 'independent' publications; or Gay Sweatshop and hundreds of other little theatre groups; or Virago and History Workshop and Readers and Writers Cooperative and Compendium and Centreprise and Comedia and – you name it? Young people on the Left or Right do not expect to hear the new sounds which speak to them of their time on either BBC or ITV, though they might catch them from the 'independents' clustered around Channel Four, from Radio Laser or even, God help us, the dreaded, arch-commercial, 'pirate' Radio Caroline. Much of this is radical initiatives operating precariously in the margins of the capitalist market. But even when you move from the margins of the market, the postivie sentiments of younger people on the Left, post-1968, instinctively gravitate to those local or 'grass roots' initiatives, where people, by their direct self-activity, can be persuaded to supplement or develop new struggles around the existing bureaucratic forms of provision of the state. The libertarianism of the Right has been matched, I believe, by a steady and unstoppable, slow but strong current of 'libertarianism' on the Left – mirroring, in its own way many of the broader social and economic trends at work in society, transforming daily life and everyday attitudes, including those of the younger generations on the Left.

Does all this then add up to a covert invitation to give up another set of 'old' socialist ideas, lie back and learn to love the free market? Not at all. But it *is* an invitation to open our minds and fertilise our imaginations a little by direct infusions from the contradictory reality of what Marx, in his simple way, used to call 'real history'. For one thing, we know that, wherever in Eastern Europe, under the actual-existing socialism, the system of rigid economic planning of life, from steel factories to hat pins, has been relaxed a little, the first – though not necessarily the final – form which this has assumed is a return, within the framework of socialist planning, of some 'free market mechanisms'. This is not a problem to be left to left economists and experts on Eastern Europe since the image and reality of actual-existing socialism is a problem for *all* socialists and has been such a trump card in the Right's struggle against the very appeal of socialism in the West. The second lesson we might draw is linked with this re-evaluation of a whole historical experience, though not in a directly organisational way. It is simply the re-examination of the new impetus towards choice, the new spirit of pluralism and diversity, which has become such a driving force of the masses under advanced capitalism and which will have to be more centrally reflected in our thinking about socialism if we are ever to convince large numbers of people that socialism is a superior 'way of life' to that which, with all its ups and downs, they already know. Why else should the toiling masses under capitalism ever commit themselves to an alternative which offers them *less* than they can currently get?

No room for naivety

I don't think we can afford to be *naive* about the state. Negatively, though the state is a contradictory force, it does have a systematic tendency to draw together the many lines of force and power in society and convert them into a particular 'system of rule'. In that sense, the state *does* continue to organise and orchestrate the space of capital accumulation in its broad societal aspects, and hold a particular, exploitative social order in place. This is *not* a neutral function – though it is not the state's only function, either. But insofar as it is its role, the state has to be dismantled, and another conception of the state put in its place. The lesson I think we can draw here is that we have as yet a wholly inadequate conception of how a socialist state would operate in ways which are radically different from that of the present version.

We can't afford to be naive about the market either. It *is* the principal exploitative mechanism of a capitalist social order when set to work in the context of private property and capitalist economic forms. I am not sufficient of an economic expert to know whether some aspects of the market can be combined with socialist economic forms but I am sure we need to ponder the idea more deeply. Certainly, I feel sure that socialism cannot exist without a conception of *the public*. We are right to regard the 'public sector', however little it represents a transfer of power to the powerless, as an arena constructed against the logic of capital. The concept of 'public health' *is* different from the idea of private medicine because it deals with the whole environment of health, which is more than the sum of individual healthy bodies – a *social* conception of health as a need, a right. 'Public transport' is not simply a practical alternative to private transport because it embodies conceptions of equal access to the means of mobility – to movement around one's environment as a publicly-validated right. The idea of 'public space' signifies a construction of space *not* bounded by the rights of private property, a space for activities in common, the holding of space in trust as a social good. In each case the adjective *public* represents an advance in conception on the limits of possessive individualism, of liberal thought itself. In this conception of the public and the social, socialism is *still ahead*. And the public can only be carved out of market space, capital's space, by the engine of state action.

The state and society

On the other hand, 'the public' cannot be identical with the state. Once the logic of capital, property and the market are broken, it is the diversity of social forms, the taking of popular initiatives, the recovery of popular control, the passage of power from the state *into* society, which marks out the advance towards socialism. We can envisage a 'partnership' between state and society, so long as the initiative is always passing to society, so long as the monopoly over the management of social life does not come to a dead halt with the state elite, so long as the state itself is rooted in, constantly draws energy from, and is pushed actively by popular forces. One of the reasons why some of the things which have developed around the GLC are

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so exciting, so pre-figurative for the Left, is precisely that one begins to see here and there a glimmer of a local state transforming the ways in which it 'represents' society politically; being *more* dependent on the passage of power, through the state, *to* the constituencies than it is on monopolising power; hence, of how a new principle, centralised through the instrumentality of the state, can then yield space to a wide variety of different forms, social movements and initiatives in civil society. What is no longer tenable or tolerable is the state-management of society in the name of socialism. Pluralism, in *this* sense, is not a temporary visitor to the socialist scene. It has come to stay.

We could put all this another way by reminding ourselves that what Marx spoke of when he referred to socialism was the *social* revolution. The democratisation of society is as important as dismantling the bureaucracies of the state. Indeed, perhaps the most important lesson of all is the absolute centrality to all socialist thinking today of the deepening of democracy. Democracy is not, of course, a formal matter of electoral politics or constitutionalism. It is the real passage of power to the powerless, the *empowerment* of the excluded. The state cannot do this for the powerless, though it can enable it to happen. They have to do it for themselves, by finding the forms in which they can take on the control over an increasingly complex society. Certainly, it does not happen all at once, through *one* centre – by simply 'smashing the state', as the sort of socialist thinking which is fixated on the state would have it. It has to happen across a multiplicity of sites in social life, on many different fronts, including, of course, the state itself, whose tendency to concentrate power is precisely what constitutes it as a barrier to socialism. Gramsci advanced the profound idea that hegemony is not constituted only by the state, but in the multiple centres of civil society. It follows that an alternative conception of socialism must embrace this struggle to democratise power across all the centres of social activity – in private as well as public life, in personal associations as well as in compulsory obligations, in the family and the neighbourhood and the nursery and the shopping centre as well as in the public office or at the point of production. If the struggle for socialism in modern societies is a war of position, then our conception of socialism must be of a society of *positions* – different places from which we can all begin the reconstruction of society for which the state is only the anachronistic caretaker. □

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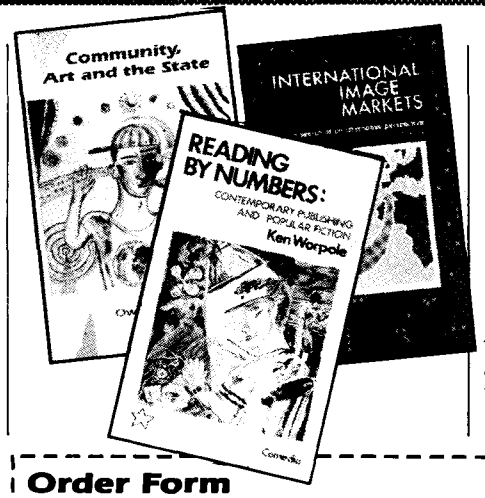

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Drug-taking is on the increase. What can be done about it?

Britain's DRUG Problem

Bent Gordon

'We will treat the victims, and we will warn the vulnerable, but must tackle the evil itself. It is the Government's urgent priority to cut off the flow of drugs and hit supply.'

With these words Health Minister Mr Kenneth Clarke addressed the Conservative Party Conference, summing up the Government's strategy to reduce drug abuse — or, at least, to reduce mounting concern over drug abuse.

The new measures include an extra £5m for drug treatment and rehabilitation services, a campaign of public information, more customs officers, organised in mobile squads and life sentences for heroin traffickers and dealers. These measures are perhaps the least that a Conservative administration, alert to pressures from the grassroots, could be expected to mount. Not since the 60s has a political party conference debated drugs. Both the Conservatives and Labour parties recognise that whilst there is a degree of overstatement and misinformation about drugs doing the rounds, there has been some increase in levels of drug use – especially heroin use (today often smoked rather than injected). Each party paints the problem in ways familiar to it, Labour emphasising unemployment and the cuts for the increase in drug use and for inadequate facilities for a response, whilst the Tories pose the issue as a moral one.

The issue of drug abuse is addressed in a climate of concern for law and order. And the stage has perhaps been reached where the Government's credibility is at least partly bound up with the question of its ability to *translate* its success in redefining crime as a central political issue, into an equal success in reducing crime – or at least reducing the appearance of crime.

This is the context within which policy about drug misuse now mainly falls. Earlier this year, for example, the 'policy lead' on drugs passed from a DHSS-led informal network of civil servants in the DHSS, Home Office, DES and Scottish Home and Health Department, to a more formal, standing ministerial group chaired by Home Office minister David Mellor. It is also the Government's intention, announced earlier this year, to bring in legislation during the present Parliament for life sentences plus confiscation of assets for drug traffickers. Whether this will have the hoped-for effect remains to be seen. Labour MP Clive Soley has suggested that such penalties will not be effective, and

> what is needed is a firm response

mean that criminals will be more ready to use arms in order to evade capture. But as a party, Labour has a history of joining with Conservatives in seeking a solution to the drug problem through the imposition of higher and higher penalties for suppliers. There is no fundamental break between the drug policies of the two parties as far as their attitudes to suppliers are concerned.

The new anti-trafficker plans may serve to take the heat off the Government in respect of a rising panic over crime at the other end of the market – the young user who reportedly indulges in occasional property crime. There has been sustained press reporting of an alleged link between heroin use and crime, especially in the local press, and it seems now to be almost a conventional lay wisdom that heroin use leads to crime.

It is not difficult to see how this perception might arise and make sense to millions warned about youth, crime and the coming apart of familiar patterns of economy and culture in Britain – particularly in areas of high unemployment. People see many bad things happening, and they put them together in ways that make sense to a British sensibility. There is an enemy without – dirty foreigners who are sending us their filthy drugs and making victims of our children. Yes, our children do sometimes steal from mother's purse, in the street or from cars and property – but this is because they have been led astray not only by outsiders but also by an enemy within (permissive, pot-smoking social workers and the like), and hence been trapped into expensive vices. Yes, we cannot communicate with or control our children — but that's not our fault, we always did our best. Yes, there is more crime nowadays, but the causes are not intrinsic to the society to which we have given our consent — the causes lie in our softening as people.

What is needed is a firm response. As pop star Pete Townshend put it to a meeting at the Conservative Party Conference: 'There can be no shilly-shallying. Children have to be shoved, pushed and bullied'. It's common sense!

There are signs that this populist perception of the problem has now run considerably ahead of the Government's intentions. Whilst a stress on nationality and domestic law and order has been a cornerstone of the Government's general appeal on policy issues, and whilst the drawing of parental responsibility into the centre of debate is welcomed, there is some feeling that the present wave of anxiety might go too far. One concern is around proposals put forward by Conservative MP Teddy Taylor amongst others that a large-scale anti-drug advertising campaign be mounted (*Sunday Express*, April 29).

This raises two questions. First, would any such campaign work, in the sense of causing a diminution of drug use and associated problems? Second, whether or not drug use actually declined, might not the decline be immeasurable or minimal, and might not the campaign have the grossly counter-productive effect of whipping up yet more public anxiety over drug use? Might not drug use become such a *bête noire* that more and more social ills become attributed to it — and the Government criticised for not eradicating this menace?

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Might not the Government, in other words, be hoist on its own petard, and find that an anti-drug publicity campaign acted as a rogue spotlight illuminating what, in the context of a commitment to crime prevention, looks like an embarrassing failure?

If, on the other hand, the Government 'does nothing' then it may be accused of inaction. The Irish Government has been considerably embarrassed by the quite favourable publicity gained by Sinn Fein in warning, moving on and punishing criminals, including drug dealers. Several conversations amongst concerned groups and persons in the UK have turned this way, with parents saying that it is a pity there are no vigilantes in their localities. Local politicians have supported local drug advice and/or rehabilitation centres and have pressed central government to do more. At national level, Labour's Michael Meacher has used colourful descriptions of the drug problem as a stick to beat the Government over its general social and health policies. There are evidently dangers for the Government in doing too little, as well as in doing too much. Drug abuse may not be an absolutely central political issue, but it is too sensitive to get badly wrong.

So, what advice have ministers been getting from their civil servants?

The Home Office, increasingly the key ministry, is drawing not only upon its experience built up over the years of constructing statistics on drug-related crime and on notified addicts, but also upon its more general research and policy planning in the area of crime prevention. One major Home Office research effort of the last few years has been to look at the possibilities for reducing people's belief in the probability of their or their neighbours becoming the victims of crimes committed by drug users, rather than stoke their existing fears. In line with this, the Government is currently more concerned to reassure its public that effective steps are being taken to get the big pushers than to invite the community to participate in a 'war on drugs' of the kind that President Nixon declared in the 70s. The current relatively low-key approach reflects an appreciation of the dangers of over-stimulating expectations that this particular aspect of public policy can provide exemplary successes.

At the DHSS there has been a scramble to respond to the recent politicisation of drug problems. The combination of a general emphasis upon self-help and a specific focus upon *parental* responsibility have resulted in an appeal to parents to understand and control their offspring. The state, as Health Minister Kenneth Clarke stressed, cannot and should not be expected to substitute for parents. It has fallen to the DHSS, as the ministry closest to 'the family', to draw up a leaflet for parents.

Overall, the Government's strategy against drug abuse consists of three main parts. For the young victims — compassion, care and a search for a cure. For parents and professionals whose responsibility it is to take care and control of the young, the vulnerable and the anti-social elements in society — advice, support, and limited resources to enable them to discharge those responsibilities. But for the morally debased entrepreneurs who take free market theory a little bit too literally, and profit from the importation, distribution and trade in illegal drugs — denunciation. The strategy has a bit in it for everyone, and is a reasonable stop-gap for a Government that knows that there really is very little that it can do to stop heroin use in present social conditions. □

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BREAKING NEW STYLE

Interview with Jeff Banks

Jeff Banks is well known in the fashion business. He trained in interior design before venturing into the design of clothes and the business itself. His chain of shops – *Warehouse* – began in 1976 and has grown since then. Today *Warehouse* is renowned for its successful combination of value-for-money and style. Here Jeff Banks talks to Sally Townsend and Maria Loftus about the fashion industry and design and how it has changed since the 60s.

Can we start by asking you a bit about your own background and how you come to be interested in fashion and design. Did you go to art school?

My dad's a sheet metal worker and because of this background he wanted me to get a job in industry – in a drawing office or a design office of, say, a large sheet metal company. That would have been his ideal. So I got set on that route and was intending to go into a technology career. I registered with the Brixton College of Building and Design because I wanted to do architectural design and particularly interior design. But I then veered off a bit and got involved in painting at Camberwell School of Art for a year. I gave up painting when I realised I wasn't going to be another Jim Dine or David Hockney. I then concentrated on interiors but the painting that I'd done gave me an appetite for textiles so I ended up training as an interior designer.

However, I couldn't get a job doing that so I worked for a short period as an illustrator in a display company and then decided that what I'd have to do to get work would be to open my own interior design business. Therefore I opened a shop in Blackheath and on Day 1, I realised that to go through the long and arduous task of establishing oneself as an interior designer was not going to be as much fun and was not going to be as pleasurable as being able to instigate things with the speed that one could do it in the fashion industry. So I had to start from scratch again.

The Warehouse shops have a very distinct design and style and you only sell your own products there. Where did the ideas for the shops come from?

It was just seeing the enormous wastage that goes on in this industry. It's one of the most wasteful industries I've ever come across, because all the time it's producing ideas and sampling ideas that are thrown out at various levels by the unsuspecting public (that is, both professional and unprofessional publics). So that what you get are yarn people producing giant yarn collections; you get fabric people producing enormous fabric collections; designers producing enormous cat-walk and runway collections, and only 10 per cent of all of them ever get through. All the way down the line there's this enormous overproduction of ideas and wastage, and particularly during the mid-70s they not only wasted this vast ideas output, they also manifested it by going into production of the idea before they'd even sold them. So all over the globe you had these butter mountains of textiles in one form or another. We could see the banality of allowing this to continue because, on the one side, we were looking at this enormous wastage and, on the other side, we could see the products we were wholesaling at that stage for shops like Harrod's and Liberty's rocketting in price to the point that we were manufacturing things that we ourselves simply couldn't afford to buy! You'd look at the price of a jacket you'd designed and see a vast profit margin.

We decided to purchase the fabrics that were piling up in warehouses all over Europe and then use our design ability. And that's how we started. And gradually we realised that this formula was much, much more efficient than anything we'd gotten involved in up to then, providing we kept it small, providing we didn't over-expand or extend ourselves. Effectively what we now do is design a collection that is almost wholesale to the public, that's the price advantage that people get.

Why do you think clothes shops like Warehouse and Next seem to have the edge when it comes to fashion on bigger chains like Marks and Spencer and C & A?

I think M & S would class themselves as being successful. I tend to question that success and I question it in two areas: in the personal area as to whether or not looking at the lowest common denominators in people all the time is a correct attitude. And I question the large conglomerates that beef skill, fundamental crafts that people have acquired. You take away from a person if you do that. I find that large organisations tend to do that, so I question that success in terms of what we try to do, and I say 'try' because we're still endeavouring to reach what we would class as being successful – when you feel something indigenous in what you're doing, something that has longevity. What we aim to do is to cut out a much smaller segment of the market and try to do it well without talking down to people and reducing them to a box. And in providing for them in that way, we have to employ skilled people who enjoy practising their craft.

Your concept of the customer seems to be reflected in your shop fronts where you've cut down on the usual extra bits and have chosen to show off the clothes themselves and allow customers to see right into the shop. They do seem much more functional.

Design is the ability to imagine a problem and then create the solution to it. Out of that you have what is design logic. Having created original garments you then want to display them in a way that is logical to

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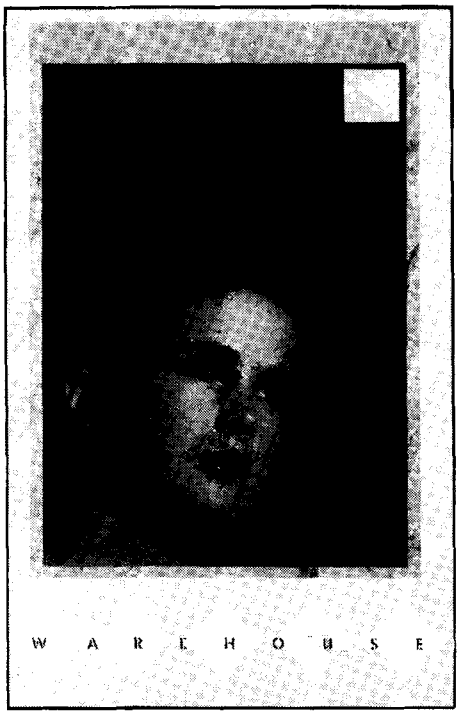

people when they walk into your shop so that whatever their temperament, they can serve themselves because the shop is laid out logically and *minimally*. People then don't get confused by lots of embellishments and end up buying something that they don't really want.

We really want somebody to find the atmosphere in our stores pleasurable, so in a way they are uplifted when they go in and feel a little bit special. Customers do sometimes let us know what they think of the shop. We had a lady write to us and say she found modern shops really annoying because when you've tried something on that doesn't fit you, you have to get dressed again to go out and select something else. She suggested using robes so that if you want to go out on the shop floor you can just put one on and go out. Now we manufacture robes that are in every changing room.

You have tried to dispense with the traditional shop assistant. Are they no longer part of today's shopping environment?

There is a sort of subtle education that we give to people who are there to assist, because we believe that the old art of retailing, although it has changed in this modern environment and atmosphere, still has to be able to look after and help people, so much so, indeed, that we've started a course for fashion retailing. Although you don't want to be pounced on when you walk into a shop, you do want someone to look after you and care for you and know about the merchandise. What has tended to happen is that again retailing as an industry has not really been properly cared for. So we decided we could make our contribution to elevating its status a bit by developing a two-year diploma in fashion retailing.

I hate the situation where you are pounced on, or things are all behind glass cabinets so that you can't touch or fiddle with them, or where they're laid out in such a way that it's illogical so that you can't put things together yourself. That's what we're trying to overcome.

Warehouse has built up a reputation for good quality design. As the chief designer how do you manage to maintain that? Do you draw on art colleges or do you do it through promoting design students through your own diploma course?

On the diploma course the students come from quite different backgrounds – they might be art students with a degree in fashion but they could equally be graduates in economics or photography. In terms of the fashion design side, two of us mainly produce the design ingredients. We have another designer, Ros Shaller, who was at St Martin's School of Art and we also have Mark Carbar who used to be with Vivian Westwood. He now teaches at St Martin's and works with us about three days a week. So that's the in-house design team and they work alongside four pattern cutters and four sample machinists.

Lynn (my assistant designer) and I put the look together that sets out the format for the season. We then dissect it and each take on various bits that we're best at doing. Over and above that we have all kinds of links with art students, for example, we have a shop in Leeds and we do projects with Batley Art School. We're currently doing one with Preston Polytechnic. We get an input from that and we also have lots of other people that are doing design projects with us.

You've built up a reputation for using unusual fabrics for a high street store, as well as promoting British materials.

I suppose that's because the majority of people that are working here have been used to working in what for some reason we call designer collection. I don't quite know what it means because it assumes there's a difference between doing what we're doing and actually designing a collection. In fact it's the same. So because you have a rapport with certain fabric clients you tend to use those continuously. For instance, years ago I started working with a company in Donegal called the McNough family – one of the oldest Donegal weaving families going back three generations in the business. It's a very small set-up and is run as a typical Donegal co-operative. Now apart from working for us this family works for Kenzo in Paris and Calvin Klein in New York and Giorgio Armani. We buy their fabric and we're able to market something in it at about a third of the price that anybody else could. We're doing some stuff at the moment from a company called Lister wools in Bradford that used to make all the original Chanel fabrics for Chanel. They're a lovely family, great experts. We've got that kind of stuff in our collection at the moment. So there are lots of bits like that – fabrics from Japan that maybe only the Japanese designers would normally use, which we are importing from Osaka. So the public get lots of bits that normally wouldn't be available to them.

Talking in more general terms, what do you think the importance of art schools and street fashion is? Some people have argued that since the 60s there's been a reversal in the way that new styles are created and take off with street design readily influencing top designers in a way that wasn't true before. Are you conscious of this change?

What happened in that 60s period was almost a backlash by a lot of youth that had been constrained into a particular way of thinking by their parents who had experienced the war. They had certain hopes and aspirations for their children based on safety which the youth resisted. That's really what that era in my experience was about. What marks out the 80s is the technological revolution we're beginning to experience now. This is exploding all the normal routes of channelling people's thoughts, movements and actions because people are no longer subject to the imposition of *constrained* media the way they used to be and are therefore not stimulated in the same way.

Once upon a time youth used to obtain its impression from a few magazines and a few radio and television stations. In fact what you've got now is an anarchic situation where when you go to your bank and

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you tell the manager that the basis of your collection is anarchy they collapse under the table and think about withdrawing the overdraft because they can't understand what the disorder is that's existing at the moment. That disorder is what is generating this enormous diversification of people's personal requirements which manifest themselves in their outward appearances. It's much more explosive at the moment without there being an easily traceable route. There is a route, you can trace it, and that's what we spend quite a lot of our time doing.

I feel 'street design' is really the demand of this explosive public awareness that we are endeavouring to cater for. And street design can be a high street in Cheltenham – it doesn't have to be a street in Liverpool. What we have tried to do is to monitor what is happening generally and then make the decision who it is we feel the most comfortable endeavouring to cater for. Because of the diversification I believe you have to be smaller and more cellular in the way that you approach these changes. A lot of these multiple organisations are unable to cope with this problem – they think they can blanket everything but they're suddenly faced with a public that is much more diversified than they ever expected it to be.

You've got plans to go into men's fashion in 1986 but at the moment you cater only for women. How do you think your designs reflect the changed expectations of women? Are you conscious of responding to these changes?

I hope I have. Very often people are surprised when they come to our company because it is largely run by women: we have a woman company secretary, chief accountant, and a woman production director. Our cloth buyers are women. Unfortunately, we only have one woman on our board of directors and this is an area which we've discussed at length and are about to correct.

I think we are forced into being sensitive to women's changed roles because it surrounds us constantly. We have women who are not married, women who have decided consciously to have a child outside marriage and want to maintain their professional career. This requires time, atmosphere and a certain lifestyle that will enable them to return to their profession and gear their working to their requirements. We have to be aware and sensitive to that. It means that you are sensitive to the way that they present themselves which is their clothing and their lifestyle. In a way you're producing design that is respectful of these demands. Other people, for example, are maintaining their elderly parents, so their income is very vital. Some people have almost got re-

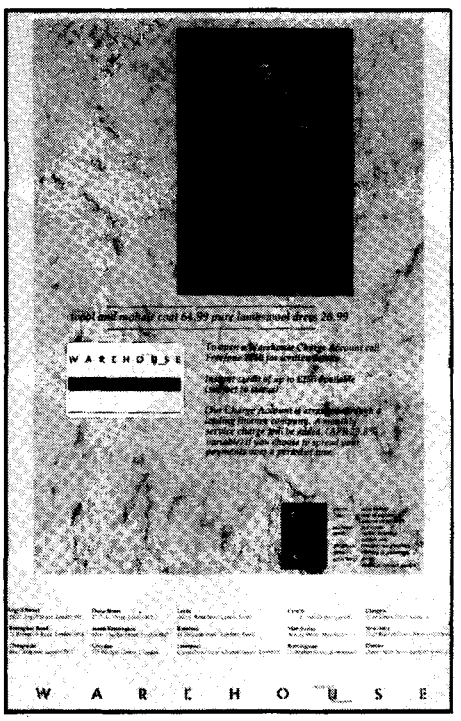
versed roles where husbands are staying at home and women are going out to work. All of that we have here in this building so we're very sensitive to it.

Your clothes appeal to women across quite a wide age-span. Is that a conscious decision on your part?

Yes. Ours is really a kind of taste awareness that is not constricted by age and so we pride ourselves that we can have a span of customers that's maybe from 13 to 70. And it's not about limiting somebody because they're 43, they don't then have to suddenly dress in that particular style. I think it's a falsity because as you get older you've been used to selection, you've educated your taste and you don't suddenly stop because you've reached a particular age.

What has now stimulated you to want to move into men's fashion and do you think that the attitude of men to fashion has changed?

Yes, what's happened, again because of the switch in roles, is that the old, established, Victorian ethics which tended to be instilled in men have gone or have begun to go. They haven't gone completely, it'll be a few years yet. So men, especially young men, are today very different creatures from their fathers. My father's generation was vastly different, with very different horizons and ideals and therefore very different ways of projecting themselves. At Warehouse we're enabling individuals to produce their own identity and that's what men are now testing and searching to do. So there is a great deal of demand there and we feel this because a lot of men are coming into our shops and buying the clothes that we make for women – they actually appreciate the content of them and enjoy wearing them. So it was almost natural for us to start producing menswear.



Since the war we've seen the divide between our functional clothes and clothes that were meant to be fashionable change and become blurred. Do you think this has presented designers with new challenges, such as using different kinds of images like work-wear and jump suits?.

My uncle was a crane driver in a steel works in South Wales in a town I came from, Ebbw Vale. He was made redundant and for six years he would get up in the morning and put his work clothes on and go and sit up on the mountain so that my aunt wouldn't know. That's how steeped in that work ethic he had become. And in a

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way it's that very ethic that makes and maintains the demand for work-wear clothes. But although people aren't working, for some obscure reason they like to feel as if they are.

Gradually this is beginning to break down. I love the Westminster Bank advert where a punk goes in to ask about an overdraft and there's a punk round the other side. It's wonderful because so often you know people have got constricted by the ethic of where they work. When you think about unemployment of increased leisure and the lifestyle that it brings, you can see that people are going to become much more overt in the way they dress socially because they won't have to carry clothes around in shopping bags or change in the lav! They will go out straight from home, or not even go out.

I believe that the era of the electronic cottage is not far away so that a lot of the activities that we tend to travel on a train to do, we will be able to do at home. Our local communities will start to become much more important again. As a clothing designer I'll be doing a lot of work at home on storable information that doesn't involve paper and I'll be able to transmit it around electronically without having to shuffle great big envelopes and bundles of magazines around. Change in our society is going to generate lots of changes in the way we look.

You've also designed some stage clothes for Annie Lennox and The Eurythmics. Does that present a different sort of challenge?

Oh yes . . . sort of severe head-butt time. Yes, it's different from the constraints of working here, because you're dealing face-to-face with an individual. She and Dave are the only people that I would do it for. We get lots of requests to produce clothes for people – it creates an upheaval in a workroom and it's very difficult to have any order around. I can't think of anyone that's as articulate as Annie and as receptive as her as to the movements and changes. She therefore sets you stimulating design problems. There are then the logistics of actually producing a very individualistic one-off that one can't produce anywhere else; then on top of this there are the logistics of them being able to stand up to quite arduous tours and all within a very low-cost budget because they're not mega-rich stars that people think pop-stars are. They're working people that have got bloody overdrafts to pay.

How do you think British designers, retailers and manufacturers are regarded abroad?

Here we like to think we're highly regarded. But generally we're not. The damage that we did to ourselves in the 60s was phenomenal – we're still carrying the can for that. Unfortunately, what we are unable to do in this country is to create an atmosphere where the designers will carry themselves with respect to accommodate industry, and industry therefore is constantly wary of design and of the benefits of design. We have tons of enthusiasm, almost naive enthusiasm, and we have good intent and all the parochial skills that are the backgone of the nation and yet somehow we can't seem to harness the talent and go about marketing it and displaying the goods correctly. It's a great shame. Go to Germany or Spain and you'll find that the design element is regarded highly – it's seen as an essential item within the product of the firm.

Is that because the people involved in manufacturing – the people who are going to invest the money – have a poor image of designers?

Yes. It's because you've got, in the main, an industry that's old and steeped in the industrial revolution where design was something the government wanted in its spare time. They're just not sensitive to what designers can do. There was an event at the Design Centre a few weeks ago where the Government was promoting its Design for Industry Grant which would enable companies to apply for a design consultant with government assistance. It was a great idea: it's like any free sample – you may end up using it. In the long term, what might happen is that the manufacturers could then call on the designers on a more continuous basis. So gradually the design improves, the product and work increase. Ironically, Norman Tebbit announced at the Design Centre that, since the scheme had been so successful (they had had to raise the budget from £3 million to £6 million), they would now reduce the Government's contribution by half. It's as though the minute they find anything that's any good they immediately destroy all the goodwill of it. The atmosphere in that room at the Design Centre was 'Christ almighty, we've only just got it all going and it's beginning to work and you can see lots of new products that have been developed, and then suddenly it's taken away'. And I think that's a great shame.

BEWARE WORKING WOMAN

What is She Holding Up?

Janice Winship

Whatever you might make of the package, for a women's magazine to 'come out' as primarily concerned with work is a notable event in a singularly cautious (to say nothing of a patriarchally organised) industry. Although most magazines gesture beyond kitchen sink and bedroom, and some like *Cosmopolitan* take (some) work very seriously, their overall image holds fast to femininity in all its well worn and arguably oppressives guises. Depending on their particular niche in the market either preoccupied with fashion, looks and all things (hetero)sexual, or with home, husbands and all things familial.

Working Woman's alternative mix however, is enough to make even the staunchest feminist hanker for just these bad old dreams of femininity; in comparison *Cosmopolitan* feels like a sisterly friend at last. The desires *Working Woman* portrays of zooming to the summit of career success – 'It's time we savoured the view from the top', Audrey Slaughter, editor; 'Salary is important. . . on your cv it shows you're on a steadily ascending curve', Jennifer Coutts-Clay, Working Woman of the Month – frankly left me gaping.

But then I'm hardly the reader *Working Woman* has in mind. Nor are most of the '10.2 million working women in Britain' confusingly reported on the first page. Rather the target readership are those in top and middle management who also have 'a home, a love life, family and friends', plus aspirants (*Campaign* 16/3/84). Counting herself as one of this rare breed Louise Botting of Radio 4's *Money Box* reflected: 'Do you think there are enough of them?' Indeed.

One assumes they've done their sums right: in the magazine's pages there's certainly lots of tables and figures about banks and airlines and salaries and information about computers and calculators to suggest a high level of numeracy, busy jet-setting sort of lives and a Serious Tone something

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TOP EXECUTIVE WITH BRITISH AIRWAYS

akin the *Financial Times*. Moreover with *Honey* (in the 1960s) and *Over 21* (the early 1970s) to her credit, Audrey Slaughter's astuteness on the magazine front is unquestionable. Yet I can't but suspect that *Working Woman* hasn't got its sell right, even for the 70,000 top cream it's hoping for (which puts it in the league of *Tatler* and *Harpers* not *Cosmo* and *Company*).

Originally to be called *Verve*, coincidentally (?) a magazine in Shirley Conran's superwoman saga, *Lace*, the more prosaic title was the result of market research and some financial support from the US magazine *Working Woman*. And perhaps this elder sister has more influence than anyone is publicly admitting. The magazine could more aptly be called *Ambitious Woman* – in-the-style-of-men. Womanly dilly dallying in the work place is strictly taboo. Advice on the career-orientated problem page – 'Work it out' – to one woman manager concerned about a male junior runs as follows: 'You need to give some thought to your future in management if you can so easily be drawn into the emotional problems of subordinates'.

Articles include 'Climbing to a Fortune' and 'The Zoom Factor'. 'What sort of product do we have with Geraldine?' asks an 'SAS expert' (Search and Assessment Services, an expensive careers bureau). All on the tough side of business and industry, not on the side of the so-called caring professions, efficiency is the keynote even in Jean Muir's fashion pages: 'How vital it is that all the items in your basic wardrobe of clothes have a good working relationship with each other. . . The right investment may be costly but its returns will be high'.

The magazine for 'realists' Audrey Slaughter calls it. But do some women really believe in and aspire to this sort of realism? Clearly in the USA where *Working Woman* is, would you believe, one of several such magazines there is a healthy (sic) demand for what Elizabeth Cagan in *The Selling of the Women's Movement* has called 'fantasies of liberation'[1]. Likewise what is so worrying about *Working Woman* (UK) is that despite Audrey Slaughter's pre-launch statement that the magazine will not be an upper-class *Spare Rib*, it's not a feminist magazine. 'Men are not the enemy as far as this magazine is concerned' (*Campaign* 16/3/84), yet the magazine is far from being *anti*-feminist.

It offers a model of feminism yoked to an ethic of competitive individualism and with traditional shades of femininity hovering in the domestic wings. The result is another version of overworked superwoman. This time round, unlike in *Options*, the stress is more on 'super(exec)' than 'woman'. Either way superwoman is the individualist and elite 'solution' – 'I'm alright sisters' – holding up any more structural resolution to shared social problems. Around the organisation of paid work with respect to 'home', and around a class competitiveness in which one woman's success can only ever be many other women's (and men's) 'failure'.

The only potentially heartening aspect to *Working Woman* is that it throws into such sharp relief the aspirational ideology women's magazines generally hold to, and which *Working Woman* takes to extremes. Perhaps it will jolt editors into a more radical questioning and maybe *Working Woman*, having proved its earnestness about Women and The Career, will see fit to think again. For the good of all women's working lives, I hope so.

[1] Elizabeth Cagan 'The selling of the women's movement' in *Women's Studies International Quarterly* vol 8 1978.

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Mozambique – Ideals and Reality

Mozambique the Revolution Under Fire
Joseph Hanlon *Zed Press*, £6.95

In the aftermath of a revolutionary seizure of power, all is euphoria or hatred, depending on whose side you happen to be on. Thus early writings on the Mozambican revolution tended to be either crass apologies for Portuguese colonialism, or quite uncritical adulations of Frelimo's victory (and I must confess to having written some of the latter myself). Perhaps this was inevitable when a relatively poorly-equipped guerrilla force not only defeated a NATO army, but also precipitated an anti-fascist uprising in the European metropolis itself. In the heady days of 1974 and 1975 it was the heroic – and the adjective is not an exaggeration – achievements of Mozambican revolutionaries, and of their comrades in Angola and Guinea-Bissau, that seized our attention. The last colonial empire had fallen, and the political situation in southern Africa seemed to have changed irrevocably.

Now, ten years later, the Mozambican economy lies in ruins, tens of thousands of Mozambican peasants have starved to death in a largely human-made famine, and the Frelimo government has signed a non-aggression pact with South Africa. Clearly it is time for a cool, unsentimental assessment. What went wrong? Or was it all inevitable? Was the path followed by Mozambique dictated by the catastrophic colonial heritage, and by the sheer brute strength of neighbouring South Africa?

Joseph Hanlon is well-placed to write such an assessment. He spent over four years based in Maputo freelancing for the BBC, the *Guardian*, and a host of other publications. His book draws on a wealth of personal experience, and on an extensive network of reliable sources, official and unofficial. The result is a work which, while deeply sympathetic to the fight to build a Mozambican socialism, can point accurately to the weaknesses and contradictions in Frelimo's politics.

Perhaps the most glaring of these is the heavy dose of voluntarism in Mozambican economic policy. There is a yawning gap between the beautiful ideals cherished by the Frelimo leadership, and the harsh realities of underdevelopment. To bridge the gap spectacular plans were drawn up on paper to conquer underdevelopment in a single decade. A grandiose ten-year plan was passed unanimously by the Mozambican parliament but was then quietly shelved when it was realised that the fantastic rates of growth called for were unattainable. Indeed, even before the vote was taken the economic ministries were already working on a much more modest three-year plan.

Where unrealistic economic policies have done most harm is in agriculture. Gigantic state farms were assumed to be the quickest way of increasing production, and supplying the cities with foodstuffs. But most Mozambican farmworkers lacked the technical expertise to cope with the heavy machinery that was imported for the state farms. Lacking also were the managerial skills to deal with the organisation of huge agro-industrial complexes. So most state farms became graveyards for tractors and harvesters, never showed a profit, and remained at disappointingly low levels of production.

While the state farms devoured the lion's share of investment, peasant farming, in which the vast majority of the population is involved, was neglected. By the time agricultural policy was officially reversed in 1983, much of the peasantry was simply refusing to market its surpluses, since the state had not channelled basic consumer goods to the countryside, and the currency had therefore become effectively meaningless.

Democratisation is another thorny issue. A commitment to grass-roots democracy has co-existed uneasily with authoritarian practices, some of them deriving from the state of war in which Mozambique has lived for 20 years, some of them survivals from colonialism, and some deeply embedded in the 'orthodox' Marxism-Leninism that Frelimo has inherited. Democracy in Mozambique is also constantly under threat from a nightmarish bureaucratic system, not much modified from Portuguese days, but now operated by a parasitic layer of timeservers and technocrats, rightly described by Hanlon as 'neither red nor expert'.

Yet despite formidable obstacles, democracy does function, albeit fitfully, in Mozambique, and Frelimo still shows a remarkable capacity for self-criticism, as demonstrated at the Party's Fourth Congress in April 1983. There are few other ruling parties in which a Congress delegate could tell the President to his face: 'We have been infiltrated. Some of our enemies are sitting on the Central Committee and on the Council of Ministers'. There are even fewer in which the critic would then be elected to the new Central Committee.

But independent Mozambique has largely been shaped by the experience of war – first against the Smith regime in what was then still Rhodesia, and then against South Africa and its surrogates of the 'Mozambique National Resistance' (MNR). It was the ravages of the MNR that turned the 1983 drought into a disaster, and condemned an unknown number of Mozambicans to death by starvation (assisted, it should be said, by the tardy response of western food donors to Mozambique's appeal for aid).

Mozambique survived the South African onslaught – in itself no mean achievement. But it survived desperately weakened, with its economy shattered, and obliged to seek a rescheduling of its foreign debt. By early 1984 there was little option but to sign a non-aggression pact. Far from being a 'sell-out', as proclaimed in ultra-left quarters, the Nkomati Accord was the best deal that could be negotiated after months of tenacious Mozambican diplomacy, first with South Africa's allies, then with the apartheid regime itself. But that was not how it was presented in

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Mozambique. Putting on a brave face, Frelimo described the Accord as a 'victory for our socialist peace policy'. A perfectly legitimate compromise with the enemy was thus exaggerated into a triumph – to the visible annoyance of Mozambique's allies. The virtue of the Nkomati Accord is that it may give Mozambique a breathing space, may give the embattled socialist republic the chance to fight another day. But that is not what the official speeches say.

Hanlon does not shrink from the most damaging result of the military confrontation – the tendency towards increasingly repressive measures. The death penalty was introduced in Mozambique, first for treason and related offences in 1979, and was then extended to cover serious economic crimes in 1983. Also in 1983 an astonishing law reintroduced the hated colonial practice of flogging, and a hasty evacuation of the unemployed from the cities was organised, with predictably unpleasant results. Such measures fly in the face of Frelimo ideals, but Mozambican leaders would doubtless argue that they had little choice. The great danger is that acts of this nature will undermine Frelimo's claim to be building an 'alternative civilisation' to that of apartheid South Africa.

One of the undoubted triumphs of the Mozambican revolution has been the creation of a health service accessible to all citizens. Hanlon devotes an entire chapter to health policy and the class struggles it generated. Another recent Zed publication *Mozambique: towards a People's Health Service* is also a very valuable account of these developments.

After ten years of independence the health sector has changed out of recognition. A network of rudimentary health posts covers the rural areas; the views of the consumers of health care are now listened to; in drugs policy the international pharmaceutical companies have been taken on and defeated; links have been built between hospitals and communities, and more health workers have been trained than in the entire 500 years of the Portuguese presence in Mozambique.

As Information Minister Jose Luis Cabaco said in summing up the revolution, in the remark which Hanlon uses as an introduction to his book: 'The number of errors we have made is enormous. But our success is that, despite the errors, we have built something'.

Paul Fauvet

Hegemony in Dispute

The Gramscian Challenge
John Hoffman, *Basil Blackwell* £17.50

In the mid-1970s the Italian Communist Party, in a series of joint statements with the French and Spanish and other Communist parties, including the British, declared that the advance to socialism in their countries could only take place on the basis of the extension of personal and collective civil liberties and the plurality of political parties. These statements gave rise to the term 'Eurocommunism'.

This has been called the 'third road' to socialism, in contrast to the expericence of social democratic governments which have not led to socialism, and to the path followed in the Soviet Union and the other socialist states in Eastern Europe. This approach is especially well fitted to Britain, where there are such deep-rooted traditions of struggle for religious, cultural and political freedoms – and it is the basis for the British Communist Party's programme, *The British Road to Socialism*.

For John Hoffman, however, Eurocommunism is a new 'revisionism', because its 'rediscovered' emphasis on democracy and consent is 'an emphasis which it shares perfectly with Bernstein and the late Kautsky'.

Gramsci's political writings, especially his concept of hegemony, are widely recognised as a key influence in the development of Eurocommunism. Hoffman's book therefore sets out to confront the challenge of Gramsci.

He takes the central theme of his book from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1929-35): the question of politics in terms of consent and coercion. He argues that Gramsci was right in seeing this as a key issue for Marxist political theory, but that his analysis, for all its pioneering signficance, fails. The reason is that Gramsci treats consent and coercion as organically separate, whereas they should be understood as dialectically united.

Hoffman founds his argument on Marx's analysis of commodity circulation in *Capital*, where Marx shows how the apparent equal exchange between the labourer who sells his labour power and the capitalist who buys it, conceals the coercive exploitation of the labourer in the factory. Just as consent and coercion are two aspects of a single process in the economic sphere, so they are also in the political sphere; for this economic coercion is re-expressed in the state, as the coercive institution which at the same time commands consent. It does this by representing the particular interests of the capitalist class in the generalised form of an illusory community. The state is a coercive instrument of class rule, but it is an ideologically charged instrument, which generalises the consensual illusions inherent in capitalist production and circulation.

Hoffman claims that this synthesis of coercion and consent is implicit in what he calls 'classical Marxism' – the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. His theme is explored with great ingenuity and erudition, and in a chapter on philosophy, he develops the notion that consent is the dialectical negation of coercion. If his theory is sound, it follows that the working class can only gain state power by opposing its own coercive force to that of the capitalist class, and that the Eurocommunist strategy of a democratic road to socialism is a myth. But there are many difficulties in taking such a simplistic view of the state – that it is purely an instrument of the capitalist class. A major problem is Hoffman's view that the capitalist state obtains consent by virtue of its being the generalised form of an illusory community.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony was based in part on his experiences in Italy after the First World War when he had to confront the question: why did the Italian parliamentary state collapse, and what was the nature of the fascist state that replaced it? For him, the problem of coercion and consent is only a starting point. The crucial question is how the ruling class maintains its hegemony, that is, how it succeeds in keeping the consent of subaltern classes. He argues that hegemony can never be

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taken for granted and has to be continually fought for afresh, and that the maintenance of hegemony is a condition for holding state power. Central to his concept of hegemony is the building of alliances through political, ideological and cultural struggles. But Gramsci's views on the building of alliances, whether by the capitalist class for maintaining power, or by the working class to gain it, are not discussed by Hoffman.

If the state is purely an instrument of the capitalist class, as Hoffman holds, then it follows that the system of parliamentary democracy as it has developed in Britain or elsewhere, is only a means of deception for creating an illusory sense of community. But is it simply an illusion, or has its historical development in Britain given rise to popular-democratic struggles which have had an impact on the state?

The Gramscian view is that these popular-democratic struggles cannot be *reduced* to class struggles even though they are closely related to them. They are a terrain for political struggle between the two major classes. In order to advance to socialism the labour movement has to find a way to link these popular-democratic struggles with its socialist objectives, building an alliance which will enable it to achieve national leadership (hegemony). The social movements which have become so important in Britain today, such as the women's movement and the peace movement, also give rise to popular-democratic struggles that do not have a purely class character. The relation between democratic struggles and class struggle is the subject of Gramsci's concept of popular-national. But this concept is not discussed, or even mentioned, by Hoffman. Instead, he devotes a lot of attention to Gramsci's notes on philosophy, finding them unsatisfactory. But Gramsci made a major contribution to the Marxist theory of politics, not to philosophy.

Hoffman has demolished his own version of Eurocommunism, not Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

Roger Simon

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VIEWPOINT

● End of year report: **Peter Kellner, Gordon McLennan, Joan Maynard MP and Robin Cook MP consider the performance of Labour under Neil Kinnock, interviewed in the last issue of *Marxism Today*.**

PETER KELLNER
Blurred vision

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the point, but one of the most significant moments of Neil Kinnock's first year as party leader was his appearance with Tracey Ullman in the comedienne's video of her song, *My Guy*. For one thing it was an innovation – and a breathtaking one if you think about past party leaders. Could you imagine Hugh Gaitskell cavorting – in public, anyway – with Anne Shelton, or James Callaghan with Cilla Black? For another, it demonstrated a dazzling capacity to communicate in a way people understood in a medium they watched.

This may seem a frivolous way to start an assessment of Kinnock's first year, but there is a serious point to be made. More than it used to be, and more than it should be, politics is about style. One does not have to approve of the point to recognise it. How often have we been exhorted to communicate with people in the language they understand? And how many of us are really willing to accept that this language is to be found in *The Sun*, on *Top of the Pops* and *Coronation Street*, more than in *Marxism Today* or even (though keep this to yourself) the *New Statesman*?

Harold Wilson grasped the point; Mrs Thatcher actively embraces it. Their records as prime ministers may be lousy, but together they have led their respective parties to victories in six of the last seven elections. And just in case it be thought that this is an attempt to sneak in a right-wing approach to politics by the back door, it is worth adding that Ken Livingstone is currently demonstrating that popular style need not be inconsistent with radical commitment.

So Kinnock has style (in the popular rather than Moss Bros sense). He also has an affable manner, an obviously sympathetic personality, and a determination to win: all qualities that the Labour Party badly needs more of. And he is becoming more succinct. He used to use three words where one would do; now he only uses two.

The packaging, then, is vastly improved. More people can now be persuaded than was remotely possible at last year's general election to undo the red ribbon and open the parcel. Has Kinnock changed what is inside?

The standard line for public consumption is that there was nothing wrong with Labour's policies last year; they just needed to be presented better. Without doubt they did need to be presented better: hence the emphasis here on Kinnock's style. My quarrel is with the 'just': the assumption that the policies were capable of winning public support if only more attention had been paid to the language of the manifesto, the co-ordination of public speeches and the organisation of press conferences.

Kinnock rightly rejected that view; he saw that hard work was needed on the policies themselves, not only their presentation. There *was* a real difference on defence; there *was* a wholly implausible policy on withdrawal from the Common Market; there *was* an intellectually dishonest fudge on incomes policy. Today, within the limits that the party imposes on its leader, Kinnock has moved party policy on all three.

Defence is the most significant. Labour had no chance of persuading sufficient voters that a non-nuclear policy could work unless the argument was won within the party first. In a technical sense the argument was won in conference votes before the last election. But there is more to political persuasion than card votes. The only way in which a non-nuclear policy could begin to have public appeal was if Left and Right inside the party made common cause. For the first time in a generation, that is now happening on defence. There are still important and tricky problems to solve – such as, what is the proper role for a medium-sized non-nuclear power in a military alliance built on the concept of nuclear deterrence? – but the first essential step towards credibility has been taken.

Conversely, incomes policy and the Common Market involve the Right seeking accommodation with the Left. Last year I found nobody except the most blinkered Walworth Road bureaucrat who honestly believed that a Labour government would pull Britain out of the EEC; now Kinnock has come clean and mounted a successful European Parliament election campaign on the manifestly more sensible proposition that withdrawal is 'a last resort'.

Thinking on incomes policy is the least developed of the three issues; but both Kinnock and his deputy-cum-shadow-chancellor, Roy Hattersley, have made clear their view that an effective deal must be done with the unions if a Labour government is to reduce unemployment as fast as it would like. Doubtless many readers of *Marxism Today* regard this as an unacceptable policy; the political fact remains that Kinnock and Hattersley have made their views known, and the roof has not fallen in on them.

If I have criticisms of Kinnock's first year, they lie neither in his style nor his development of detailed policy. His first weakness has been his insufficient control of the party, as demonstrated by his defeat at this year's party conference on the issue of reselection of MPs. The significance of the defeat concerns less the substance of the proposal – the defeated resolution proposed the feeblest imaginable change – as Kinnock's inability to organise sufficient support to win. An effective Labour leader must pick battles he can win, and make sure that his troops and tactics are sufficient to ensure victory. Kinnock failed on both counts.

My second criticism is more fundamental. Mrs Thatcher's two election victories have both been deeply ideological: not only in the sense that they have legitimised right-wing legislation and economic policies, but in the sense that she *was perceived* to have a clear vision of the kind of market-orientated society she sought to create. So far Kinnock has not yet offered an alternative vision, other than in the important but ultimately negative sense of offering a Britain without Thatcher. During the next two years he needs to address this issue so that by the time of the next election we will no longer be able to say: he means well – but he means what?

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GORDON McLENNAN
Strengths and Weaknesses

Whether measured by the opinion polls or the morale of the party as expressed at the Blackpool conference, Labour's position today is better than a year ago.

When Eric Hobsbawm asked Neil Kinnock why (*Marxism Today*, October 1984), the Labour leader said he ascribed it 'to the party'. True, as far as it goes. But there is much more to it than that.

The biggest factor has been the movement of struggle against Thatcher's policies that has developed. That includes the Labour Party, but it is much wider. Clearly the most important factor has been the miners' strike. This has increased the fighting spirit of the whole movement, given it a sense of purpose, and united great numbers of people in the trade unions and Labour Party, as was demonstrated at Brighton and Blackpool. Then there has been the continued development of the peace movement, of CND and the Greeham Common women, the campaign for local democracy, especially related to the GLC, and many other actions against the effects of Tory policy. To all these the Communist Party has made an important contribution.

Kinnock himself has played a part, and attempted to present a more popular and youthful image of the party to the electorate, though he cannot be happy about his personal rating in the polls. And his 'rating' in the Labour Party itself has dropped since he proposed constituency changes that could have removed the trade unions from the reselection process for Labour MPs. While he has given general support to the miners, the concept of active solidarity and campaigning on their behalf by the Labour Party and the rest of the movement has been lacking in his speeches. And his speech at the TUC where he placed blame for 'picket line violence' totally on the miners, was the subject of protest by miners and others in the movement, producing a shift of emphasis in his Labour Party Conference speech. During his year as leader, and indeed in his previous career, he has shown little understanding of the centrality of mass democratic and class struggle to changing the course of events.

A main theme of his speech to the Labour Party conference was that little could be done to combat the defeat the Tory attack on the British people until Labour has 'power'. On this I would make two points. First, that the struggle *now* can produce important results in throwing back the Tory offensive and can also be decisive in determining the outcome of the next election. Second, Kinnock makes the traditional social democratic error of equating 'office' with 'power'. To win office through a general election, vital though that is, would be only the first step toward transferring power from big business and the capitalist state to the working class and its allies.

In the *British Road to Socialism* the Communist Party puts forward the concept of winning a general election as part of a revolutionary process of which the next stage is the implementation of left policies after the return of a Labour government. All of this demanding the expansion and unification of all aspects of the struggle of the working class and its allies.

The idea that Labour can and should 'go it alone' and treat all other movements as mere adjuncts and sources of voting fodder, expressed not so much by Kinnock as by other Labour leaders, including some on the Left, will only delay the achievement of these aims. Labour does need to build alliances. To say this is not to advocate an electoral agreement with the Social Democratic Party/Liberal Alliance. This is a bogey conjured up by sectarians in the movement to justify their policy of opposition to the broad anti-Thatcher movement of struggle which needs to be developed.

It is an argument for consolidating support among the electorate of those who usually support Labour while winning away from their present political allegiances millions of people who now support the SDP or the Liberal Party or the Tory Party. It is an argument for building links, on the basis of respecting their autonomy, with powerful social movements and forces which in one way and another are resisting the effects of the Tory policies.

When we point to the fact that, despite the advances, Labour still has a long way to go to win the decisive majority among the electorate for its policies that is necessary if left policies are to be implemented, this is not defeatism or pessimism, as some on the Left claim. It is to face and grapple with reality.

We must remember the lessons of the past period, which show that unless left progress in the party and the labour movement, and the adoption of left policies at conferences, are translated into support among working people generally, their effect is limited. Overestimation of the level of class and political consciousness among the people and the development of policies and strategy on that basis can be disastrous for the movement.

What Labour needs to do in the coming period is make its generally progressive policies more concrete and real to millions of people, so that they see that there is a constructive alternative to Thatcherism. If at the same time it stimulates and supports every form of mass struggle for new policies, and builds alliances with other progressive and democratic forces, there will be every hope of defeating the Thatcher government and electing a Labour government committed to carrying out a left programme.

JOAN MAYNARD
Stick by your class

Neil Kinnock talks a great deal about getting power, and obviously that is crucial – there is no point in having good policies if you aren't in power to carry them out. However, having won power it's what you do with it that counts. Our past record is not good, otherwise we wouldn't have this awful government which is now beating the living daylights out of the working class.

During the last sixteen months the new ledership has helped bring about an improvement in our position, but in June 1983 we were in such a trough that it would have been difficult not to improve. Apart from Chesterfield, we have not done well in by-elections. The improvement is not deep rooted, we still have to close the credibility gap left by the last Labour government and the Wilson years.

In fact, we have been losing support in

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nearly all general elections since 1945 apart from 1966. So the first lie to nail is that the malaise at the last election was caused by the struggle in the party over the previous 3-4 years. And one could hardly expect to close that gap of nearly 40 years making in just a year.

What we need to decide is what caused the fall in support for Labour from 1945 to 1983. I remember 1945, I remember not only the majority, a little bigger than that of the present Tory government, but also the goodwill there was toward that Labour government. Over the years we have thrown that away, because we weren't true to our people. We weren't as committed to our class as the Thatcher government has been towards its class. Granted, it is more difficult for a Labour government, because it has to help the people to transform society, it has really to challenge capitalism and all it stands for. We have never been prepared to do that, we (ie, the majority of parliamentarians) have always thought that we could run capitalism better than the Tories. The Labour Party has never believed that, but the majority of Labour MPs has always acted in that belief, no matter how many times it has been proved incorrect.

So the party got sick of it, and after the last disastrous Labour government and the defeat of 1979, it realised that MPs must be made accountable (hence mandatory reselection) and that the whole labour movement should have the right to elect the leader and deputy leader (hence the widening of the franchise to include trade unions and constituency Labour Parties). In short, we increased the power of the movement over the parliamentarians. They are still resisting this change, as witness last month's conference when they tried and thank goodess failed to weaken accountability by their proposal for one member one vote.

Lessons from the last general election show that we will win support by being clear in our committment to our own class, arguing your case if it is not popular, and fighting for the class we represent.

The wonderful fight that Liverpool city council has put up against great odds was a fight between Them and Us, so we had to back the council to the hilt. To put it mildly, it wasn't easy to persuade our parliamentary leadership to do that, but the struggle in Liverpool helped us on the national executive to win that battle and Liverpool achieved a great victory, which will help every council threatened with rate-capping next year.

Then of course there is the miners' fight, a fight for jobs for this generation and the next, for the mining communities, for our coal industry and for a different set of values to the Thatcher government's. It's one thing to say that I stand beside the miners until victory is won, which I do say with all my heart. But it would carry much more weight if every member of the shadow cabinet were stamping the countryside saying it, and meaning it.

Yes, we want to win power, Neil, and the first victory we have to win is victory for the miners. That will be a victory for the class we are supposed to represent, and the beginning of the road back.

On unilateral nuclear disarmament, I believe that Neil Kinnock's position is correct, and that he is committed to the principle, but there are still leading parliamentarians who disagree fundamentally. None of such people should have front bench posts. The job of the front bench is to articulate and fight for Labour's policy and front bench spokespeople should only accept their position if they agree with the policy. What did us harm between 1979 and 1983 was not the internal struggle in the party (brought about because of the activities of previous Labour governments) but the fact that leading parliamentarians were always going on the box and the radio saying that the Labour Party was being run by a bunch of extremists – in other words, openly attacking policies the majority of the party supported.

Again I see that the deputy leader is going around speaking against Clause 4 and public ownership which, he says, can take many forms. That may be so, but we only want it to take the form that will help bring about the irreversible shift in the balance of wealth and power that we talk about but have never achieved. Can you wonder we feel nervous? Also I see that pay policy is being mentioned once again by the deputy leader, not in those words, but experience shows what the policy means whatever it's called. It means that workers are told 'you must agree to pay restraint in order to try to keep capitalism in being'. If we start down that road again we will end up where we always do when we try to put the burden of the crisis on to the people's backs – in defeat.

Our recent conference was excellent in the policies it passed. We must now work out a strategy to help win the people to support those policies. And when we win the next election, having decided on the principles we want to support, we must will the means. The Tories have given us an object lesson; they decide what is good for their class and then will the means to bring it about.

In the year ahead the top priorities are peace and jobs. The miners are fighting for jobs, and we must help them win. On peace, we need to start now to show that the Soviet Union is not the enemy and why, and that the real enemy is the Reagan government.

In all things we must convince people that we mean what we say, that when elected we will carry out our policies. The best vote-winner is integrity, truth and sticking by your class come hell or high water.

ROBIN COOK MP
Looking over the edge

Last October I wrote an article for this journal in which I charted the depth of the hole in which Labour found itself after its electoral rout in the general election. One year on is a fitting time to pause and reflect on how far we have got in clambering back out of that hole.

It is possible to point to areas of clear advance. These are most marked in relation to the Alliance, who in the summer of 1983 looked poised to eclipse Labour as the second major force in British politics, but who are currently relegated to the backmarker. The European elections were particularly encouraging in this respect as Labour displaced the Alliance as the opposition party in no fewer than 19 Euro-constituencies where Labour ended bottom on the basis of votes cast in the general election. Half a dozen of the seats where Labour overhauled the Alliance were actually among the list published by Frank Field in the week before polling as instances where Labour voters could best defeat the Tories by voting for Alliance candidates. The lurch of the SDP to the right in the slipstream of David Owen's manic dash across the political spectrum gives us the opportunity to press home the attack on the Alliance parties, who do not offer an alternative to Thatcher but a

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substitute for her.

Yet the evidence of recovery is patchy, and further effort is required before we can haul ourselves over the rim of the hole. Nor have we a leisurely three years left in which to complete the task. We can anticipate the normal revival of support for the governing party in the last year as they tug at all the levers of economic and social management to avert collision with the electorate, and therefore Labour must soon establish a commanding lead if we are to be confident of victory.

Two immediate objectives would contribute to this longer term goal. First we must restore to the political agenda those welfare issues which illustrate the case for collective solutions to social problems – notably poverty and housing, which have both been elbowed off the front pages by the priorities of Thatcher while her policies have been brewing a crisis on both fronts.

Secondly, as Thatcher's administration expands the power of the state at the expense of freedom – whether measured by local democracy, the right to association in a union, or the right of civil servants to dissent – Labour must pick up the banner of liberty as our very own. We are a party of democratic socialism, and there is ample evidence that currently the ideology of democracy provokes greater resonance in the working class than we have yet achieved for the ideology of socialism.

I am not convinced that everyone in the party has grasped the magnitude of our task and the extent to which their own conduct has a bearing on whether we succeed. It is true that there is a heartfelt recognition that the party must avoid televised squabbles of the kind that destroyed our electoral challenge last time round, and the recent defence document has attracted broad support across the movement from Denis Healey to Fenner Brockway, securing for our non-nuclear defence strategy a measure of agreement that would have been unimaginable five years ago.

However these gains in unity have been more marked in respect of the formulation of policy than in the projection of policy, although last year the consensus held that it was the presentation of our case that let us down. Here I have to confess to powerful frustration. Despite a deep-rooted demand for change from the constituency parties, and some stimulating thinking by many of the party's staff, there has been little serious reform of our organisation – certainly nothing to compare with the improvements which the Conservatives have continued to make to an electoral machine which was already streets ahead of us. I am particularly depressed that the programmes of reform offered by myself and others have been met with an entirely defensive reaction from certain members of the NEC whose revolutionary zeal for transforming British society is complemented by an alarming conservatism towards Labour's organisation.

This is particularly unfortunate as next year the capacity of the labour movement to organise successful mass campaigns will be tested to the full in the trade union ballots. I fear it is symptomatic of the wider failure of the movement to grasp the awesome significance of this challenge that they surface nowhere in the questions put to Neil Kinnock (*Marxism Today* October 1984). If these ballots go badly, the results could change the very nature of the labour movement as a partnership between the political and industrial struggle. If the opportunity which they represent is fully seized they could enable the Labour Party to reinvigorate support for its programme among the rank and file of the union membership. Either way they represent a crucial step in determining whether Labour will be in a position to escape from its hole before the next general election.

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Letters

MINIMUM STANDARDS

The recent articles by Brian Simon and Barry Hugill (*MT* Sept and Oct) have proved to be welcome contributions to a socialist critique of this government's education policies. However, I feel that one point in particular made by Barry Hugill requires some qualification. Hugill states that "Neil Kinnock, when he was shadow education spokesperson, came up with the notion of 'national minimum standards'." In fact there is nothing new in the concept of a 'national minimum' applied in this manner, a similar policy was first proposed by Sidney and Beatrice Webb in 'A Constitution for the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain'. Regarding such a policy the Webbs argued ". . . its universal application will be the foundation of any Socialist Commonwealth."

In effect therefore, what Hugill is advocating is a perpetuation of the Fabian-inspired social policy initiatives which have led to the creation of our existing over-centralized, bureaucratic and unresponsive 'welfare state'. With reference to the field of education, and more particularly the issue of the school curriculum, such policies would give central government an unprecedented degree of control; such that the current moves towards centralization which Brian Simon warned so strongly against would be given an immeasureable boost.

Surely, as socialists, we should be campaigning for a more decentralized education system, and consequently one responsive to the needs of those it is intended to serve. More central control can only mean the demands of capital playing an increasingly influential role in shaping education policy, and once again the principle of universal availability will prove to be a hollow victory for the working class.

Anne Randles and Howard Stevenson, Streatham

INTOLERABLE INQUISITION

I am wondering if a better name for *Marxism Today* would not be 'Monthly Inquisitor'.

One interview is understandable; two interviews are forgivable; but three interviews as occurred in last month's issue, are intolerable.

Can't your personages write something without having to be prompted by an interlocutor? After all, all of the four interviewees are very literate people and should be quite capable of putting pen to paper unaided by any external force.

There have been many notable people of politics and the arts who have had their thoughts recorded for them by *Marxism Today*. Is it too much to expect that the day is not too far distant when you land the biggest fish of all – Maggie herself? I am sure Eric Hobsbawm could be prevailed upon to officiate.

Sid Gregory, London

ONE DIMENSIONAL DRIVEL

Elvis Costello feels suitably chastened we can hope, after his savaging by Simon Lockwood (*MT* August). We can look forward now to his next album – The British Road to Socialism chanted in monotone, uncluttered by soul, power-chords or word-play.

But why single Costello out for such drab criticism, for doing no more than he ever claimed or intended to do? He is, at the end of the day, someone who wanted to write songs, from his own personal viewpoint, to perform in his own style, and if possible to be successful as a pop entertainer.

To like what Costello does, or not, is one thing. But why can so many on the Left never be satisfied with a contribution or a statement less than perfectly aligned with its own opinions? And what more absurd place to look for it than in the pop world? Simon Lockwood says that 'we have to decide whether Costello is making a substantially more political intervention in our culture than David Bowie'. Why?

What he does is valuable in itself: he makes the use of words and ideas important in a field where they get as little respect as in the *Sun;* his shifts of style are not changes of stance or disguise (as with Bowie), but signs of a commitment to the integrity of popular music, from R&B through Soul and Country to Pop, and a resistance to the one dimensional drivel churned out by the industry today. Taken together these, to me at least, add up to a major contribution.

That Costello has things to say which touch on our own concerns, and usually in a sympathetic fashion, is something to be welcomed. So long as he (or others like Dammers, Strummer, Sensible) has less than spotless personal politics, untarnished by bitterness or ego, should we prefer that he says nothing? *Dave Slater, Rochdale*

We welcome your letters for the December issue. They should be no longer than 250 words and arrive at the office not later than 6 November. The editor reserves the right to cut letters.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Murdoch is a freelance journalist living in Dublin.
John McIlroy is the author of *Strike!*
Denys Turner is a lecturer in theology at Bristol University.
Peter Parker is assistant editor of *Banking World* and formerly worked on *The Health Services* newspaper.
Peter Hain is the author of *The Democratic Alternative* and the Labour parliamentary candidate for Putney.
David Plotke is a sociologist at UC Berkeley who studies American politics and is an editor of *Socialist Review.*
Richard Norton-Taylor writes about Whitehall for the *Guardian.*
Stuart Hall is professor of sociology at the Open University.
Bent Gordon is a criminologist.
Jeff Banks is a fashion designer.
Sally Townsend is editor of *Marxism Today*'s Channel 5.
Maria Loftus is editor of *Marxism Today*'s Update.
Janice Winship teaches women's studies and is the author of *Inside Women's Magazines* to be published in the spring.
Paul Fauvet works as a journalist for the Mozambique Information Agency in Maputo.
Roger Simon is the author of *Gramsci's Political Thought.*
Peter Kellner is political editor of the *New Statesman.*
Gordon McLennan is general secretary of the Communist Party.
Joan Maynard is MP for Sheffield Brightside and chair of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs.
Robin Cook is MP for Livingston and Labour front bench spokesman on European affairs.

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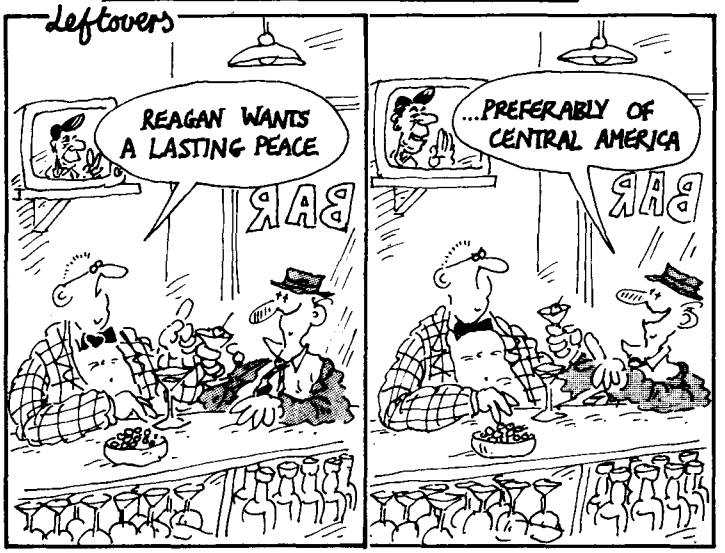

NEWS

British Art Show on tour The Arts Council has brought together the work of 84 artists to show some of the best art produced in Britain over the last 5 years. The exhibition, which goes on tour this month includes sculpture, painting, artists' film and video, performance art and work using photography and mixed media. It opens in Birmingham (City Museum and Art Gallery). Edinburgh 19 Jan-20 Feb (Scottish Academy). Sheffield 16 March-4 May (Mappin Art Gallery). Southampton 18 May-30 June (Art Gallery).

Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize. Dr Margaret A Rose has been awarded the Prize for her book *Marx's Lost Aesthetic – Karl Marx and the Visual Arts*, awarded in recognition, and as encouragement, of outstanding research and writing in the tradition of Isaac Deutscher. The closing date for material to be considered for 1985 is May. Submissions should be sent to The Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize, c/o Lloyds Bank, 68 Warwick St, SW1.

Frank Cousins T&GWU Peace Award. The Transport and General Workers Union has launched a peace award scheme to mark the 80th birthday of Frank Cousins. The aim is to assist with travel, research and the promotion of peace issues, a recipient nominated annually by a panel comprised of representatives of the T&GWU, and prominent personalities from the labour and peace movements. This year's nominee is Joan Ruddock who was awarded £1000 under the scheme.

CAMPAIGNS

Benefits take up. £900 million in social security benefits are going unclaimed. One reason is that to claim a means tested benefit you have to prove you are in need and this often involves an assault on privacy and sense of worth. The Child Poverty Action Group suggest that inadequate information, the Government's over-emphasis on policing fraud and the low quality of service in DHSS offices all deter people from claiming. For information on their campaign contact Jo Roll CPAG (01-242 3225/9149).

Civil Service Union to combat smuggling. With the number of drug addicts increasing at an alarming rate and cocaine and heroin becoming street drugs the Society of Civil and Public Servants (the union representing Customs Officers) is intensifying its campaign for the recruitment of at least 500 additional Customs Officers. This, they argue, will raise revenue, restore the credibility of Customs Controls and combat escalating drug addiction. Contact SCPS, 124/130 Southwark St, SE1 01-928 9671.

MEETINGS

(S)mothering invention. Woman and technology, 12 Nov (Mon). One in a series of seminars organised by the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science. Opening by Wendy Faulkner and Erik Arnold (SPRU) 6.30pm at Adam's Arms, 4 Conway St, London W1.

Feminism and the Radical Tradition 26 Nov (Mon). A lecture by Barbara Taylor the author of *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, the winner of the 1983 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize, 7.30pm at the London School of Economics (New Theatre), Houghton St, WC2.

Open wide and close your mind 26 Nov (Mon) A critique of current dental practices organised by BSSRS to be opened by Aubrey Scheim. 8.00 at Adam's Arms, 4 Conway St, London W1.

Eurocommunism in the Eighties 29 Nov (Thurs). One in a series of 'Discussions for Socialists' to discuss what lessons the British Left can learn from the Italian experience of Eurocommunism. To be opened by Judith Bloomfield, a historian researching into Italian Communism. Organised by the Dudley Communist Party 7.30pm at Dudley Library, St James Rd, Dudley.

CONFERENCES

Africa; Arms & Development 10 Nov (Sat) A conference to examine the arms trade as it affects development issues in Africa. Organised by the Commonwealth Institute in conjunction with the United Nations Assn. At the Commonwealth Institute, London. Details from 01-603 4535.

History Workshop 16-18 Nov (Fri-Sun). The 18th History Workshop conference Sessions include The 1944 Education Act 40 Years on, Popular Culture, Visual History, The Home Front-Conditioning of Women's experience, Irish Labour at home and abroad. Also film shows, Socialist Feminist theatre, Labour History Trail, History Workshop market and creche. At Moat Community College, Maidstone Rd, Highfields, Leicester. Tickets £8.00 (£3.00 unwaged). Programme from HW 18 Collective, c/o Cooperative College, Stanford Hall, Stanford, Loughborough 050 982 2333.

Chile Committee For Human Rights AGM Forum on Chile 17 Nov. Programme will include major speakers, video and workshops. Topics to include censorship in Chile, Church-State Relations, Chile's Foreign Debt, Protest Movement. All welcome, admission free at The Africa Centre, 38 King St, London WC2E 8JT.

Lesbian and Gay Socialist Conference 24-25 Nov Proposed workshops include: Class, Lesbian/Gay at Work, Unions, Lesbians and Gay Men Working Together, Lesbian Sexuality, Gay Male Sexuality, Sexism, Paedophilia, Strategy for Liberation. More workshops will be organised. Creche provided. Crash accommodation available if requested in advance. People with disabilities: Wheelchair access with assistance, disabled toilets, tapes of programme etc available on request, free registration for helpers of people with disabilities. To be held in Edinburgh. Details from Conference organisers c/o Lesbian and Gay Community Centre, 58A Broughton St, Edinburgh.

EVENTS

Left Alive 2-3-4 Nov A weekend festival of discussion, politics, music, sports, dance and drama, organised by *Marxism Today*. 70 plus sessions on offer including Towards 2000, The State of the Arts, Images of the Left, Arms Conversion, Crisis on Fleet Street plus Cabaret and Creche. At City University, London E1. Tickets £10 (£6 unwaged). Contact Mary Braithwaite 01-251 4406.

Socialist Bookfair 2-3 Nov. Now in its eighth year this event provides a comprehensive display of socialist, anarchist, feminist, black, third world, gay, trade union and pressure group literature from Britain and abroad. At Camden Centre, Euston Rd, London NW1.

28th London Film Festival 15 Nov-2 Dec. This year's festival moves out into eight different venues, and features a strong programme of films from well known directors, Third World films, new features from Australasia. To herald the advent of British Film Year there is a large selection of new British films including Puttnam's *Killing Fields* and also a Family Film Festival. Information from the LFF 928 3842/928 4114.

Employment and Unemployment '84 22 Nov (Thurs). One day exhibition on employment and training initiatives organised by Dundee Resources Centre for the Unemployed with a wide range of statutory-voluntary organisations displaying their work. DRCU AGM at 5.15pm. Evening event 7.84 Scotland present 'The Baby & the Bathwater' (Free to unemployed) 8.00pm at Marryat Hall, City Square, Dundee. Contact 0382 27735.

Entries for the December Update should be sent as soon as possible (latest date Friday 2 November) to Maria Loftus, Marxism Today 16 St John Street London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 or 01-249 9509 (evenings). Space is limited. We cannot guarantee the appearance of your listing. However a booking in our new classified section will guarantee entry in both classifieds and update. For details see page 42.

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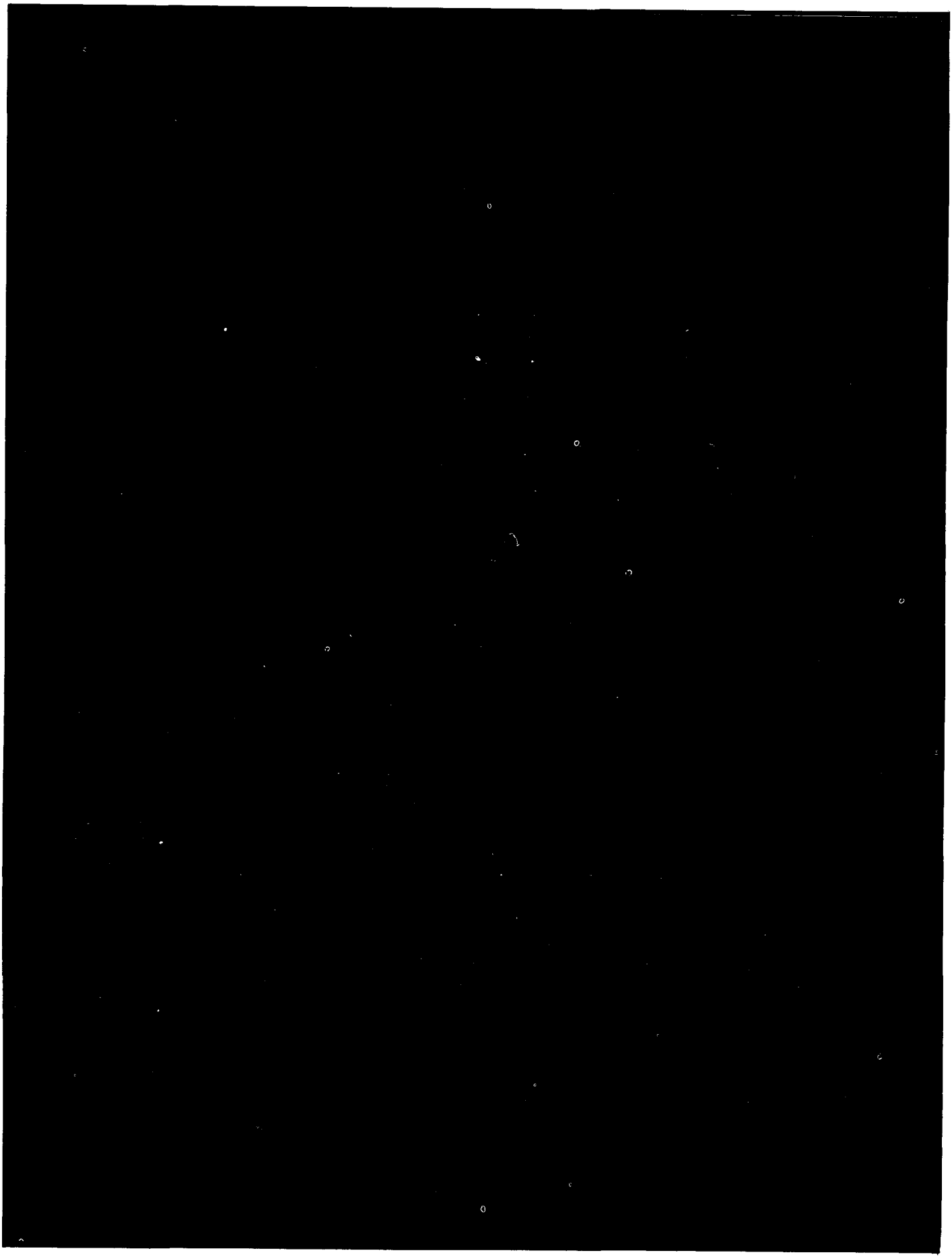

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